

Becoming India

Western Himalayas under British Rule

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Preface

In August, 1990, when V.P. Singh, the Prime Minister of India announced the partial implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations, large-scale student protests erupted in many college campuses of North India. These protests challenged the move to reserve a chunk of government jobs for candidates from, what is called, the ‘Other Backward Classes’ (OBCs), based on the recommendations of the Mandal Commission. While these student protestors received much support from the urban middle classes of North India, no political party came out in formal support, nor did any institution of the State or Government. This was primarily because the OBCs represented a large mass of agriculturalists, artisans and rural service providers – the *Shudras* according to Hindu caste hierarchy. More often than not a clear demographic majority in any given geographical region. In the context of universal suffrage, it would have been an electoral suicide to oppose a move which purportedly benefited them.

But the Himachal Pradesh Government seemed to fly in the face of such basic political logic and filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the implementation of these OBC reservations. These reservations also evoked strong protests in the neighbouring regions of Garhwal and Kumaon and fed into their long standing demand for a State separate from OBC dominated Uttar Pradesh. What was striking was that in these Himalayan regions, the muscle of the anti-reservation protests was provided by the agriculturalists. It was

perhaps the only part of India where one could say with some certainty that a majority of the people opposed reservation.

The open and strong support from all political parties in Himachal to this agitation against OBC reservations was attributed by the media, and much of academia, to some form of popular indignation based on moral and political principles and against an assault on ‘merit’.

My first research interest into the social history of the Himalayas began at this time, when I felt that such explanations were, at best, puerile.

Most of my childhood and adolescence was spent in Shimla. Through my college and university years, Shimla became for me an idyll to which I retreated from the heat and dust of Delhi. Its pleasant weather, forest draped mountains, quaint English cottages and childhood memories had obviated any critical look at its history or society. The agitations opposing the Mandal Commission recommendations forced the first rupture in my romantic notions about the Himalayas.

Looking back at my years in school in Shimla, I realised that there were no Himachali OBCs in my class. In fact, I could not recall any Himachali OBC friend or neighbour. That made me sit up. On enquiry, I was told that in most parts of the Western Himalayas the social composition was bereft of the *Shudra* castes. Apart from the Scheduled Castes, there are only Brahmins, Rajputs and Vaishya castes!¹

The popular history of the region states that the people in the Western Himalayas descended from the Aryan tribe of the Khash and that this origin explains their uniform upper-caste status. Those who were classified as the Scheduled Castes, were supposed descendants of pre-Aryan groups, now referred to as the Nagas. Further, I was told about the many struggles waged by this Khash peasantry against Begar imposed on them by the Hill States and the British. The stories of these struggles are still alive in popular memory and are intertwined with the memory of the struggle for independence.

1. Actually this is true only of the higher mountainous areas which in Himachal Pradesh are commonly referred to as ‘Upper Himachal’. The social composition of the sub-montane regions and lower Shiwaliks (like Kangra and Hamirpur districts of Himachal, or the Doon area of Uttarakhand) is somewhat different and one does find the presence of some OBCs there.

A few years later, when I had to work on a seminar paper for my Masters in the university, I decided to study the colonial history of the Western Himalayas. My initial foray at studying the history of the region was on a form of forced, unfree labour (*Beth*) prevalent in that area. I began my doctoral researches with the intention of broadening the scope of this initial foray into the history of the region by studying the entire gamut of social relations and agricultural practices which supported the different forms of unfree and forced labour I had been able to identify during my seminar paper. If my initial researches into the social formations of the region had shaken my romantic vision of these mountains, which I shared with numerous others, my doctoral research delineated the obstacles, daunting like the high mastiffs of the Himalayas, to writing the history of this region.

The first problem I faced was a paucity of secondary sources on the history of the region which would have helped me place my research into the perspective of a larger debate. The one and only researched history of the region, on which I could bank for verifiable accounts, had been written in 1933 and covered regions to the west of the Simla Hill States². Apart from this there was one work on the history of resistance to forest laws in Garhwal and Kumaon³ and a handful of Ph.D.⁴ and M.Phil. theses available in the library of the Himachal Pradesh University. The only secondary sources available in abundance were the anecdotal histories and accounts of Simla as a town of colonial trivia and sundry European charms. I was warned by a historian friend of mine, who was in the midst of his own researches into the Western Himalayas, that trying to work on the history of the region was like floating on a rudderless raft in a sea without even a compass for guidance.

Apart from the lack of proper sources to write a full scale account of the history of unfree labour in the Western Himalayas, I came up against conceptual barriers too.

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2. Hutchison, J. and Vogel, J. Ph., *History of Punjab Hill States*, 2 Vols. Lahore, 1933.
 3. Ramchandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1989
 4. Mohan Singh Rathore, *Nineteenth Century Cis-Sutlej Hill States*, H.P. University, Simla, 1987, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis).

I am no apologist for unfree labour, and there are enough sources to indicate the opposition to such labour by the region's peasantry. But it seemed to me that unfree labour in the Western Himalayas was linked as closely to reciprocal labour as it was to the commonly understood form of servile unfree labour. Further, this unfree labour was located inside the matrices of the polyandrous Himalayan family, the egalitarian clans and imperfect Hill States, all subsumed under the overarching structure of colonialism. Sociological and historical literature on India under colonialism seemed to provide diminishing conceptual clarity the deeper I delved into the social history of the Western Himalayas. Not only had the Western Himalayas never been a political part of any Indian entity throughout history, there was a clearly discernable sociological *gap* between the plains of North India and this region.

I realised that to write a contextualised history of unfree labour in the Western Himalayas, I would need to understand the local dynamics of social and economic transformations during the colonial period *separate* from the *general* history of India under colonialism. It was through this effort that I finally decided to shift the focus of my research from unfree labour under colonial conditions to a mapping of the colonial encounter in the region by foregrounding its exceptionalism and focusing primarily on transformative processes.

While the thesis mapped out the broad history of the Western Himalayas, this book takes the argument further. The thesis traced the history of the region from the time of its conquest by the British in 1815 till the coming of political independence in 1947. In its somewhat ambitious attempt to study the consequences of colonial rule in the Western Himalayas over a period about 132 years my doctoral thesis treaded lightly on the historical ground, surveying the field and marking the signposts for future study, rather than delving deep into any single issue.

This book is based on my doctoral research but takes my argument further in two significant ways. It questions the implicit historical unity of the geographical space we call India today. By foregrounding the distance of the Western Himalayas from the rest of India at the beginning of the colonial encounter, it argues for a more nuanced history of colonial India. India was a product of the processes unleashed by colonialism, and different regions—like the Western

Himalayas—which constituted India at the culmination of the colonial encounter each had specific histories of their colonial encounter. These specificities need to be studied independently of any general history of Indian colonialism and not merely as a sub-set of that general history. Hence the title of this book.

This brings me to the second departure this book makes from my doctoral thesis. It argues that such a particularist reading of the history of the Western Himalayas would suggest that the colonial encounter here was *non-cataclysmic*, unlike for much of the Indian sub-continent. This is not some lame-duck attempt at revival of the historiography of colonial apologia. It is not an argument regarding the intentions of the British rulers nor does it claim credit for colonialism for whatever beneficial consequences there may have been as an outcome of this encounter. What it argues is that given the geographical, social and economic contexts of the Western Himalayas, colonialism did not introduce a sudden rupture in the economic or political life of the people as it did in most other places. This non-cataclysmic nature of the colonial encounter in the Western Himalayas then had a significant bearing on the way in which the Himalayan people responded to its transformative processes. It is a result of these that the desolate, foreboding and violent social geography of the Western Himalayas emerged as the touristy idyll at the conclusion of the colonial encounter.

This book, therefore, is not a general history of the colonial period in the Western Himalayas. Rather it narrates the story of the transformation of the social formation of the Western Himalayas during the period of British rule. It focuses on the basin of the Sutlej river for its narrative. Complimentary evidence and sources are taken from the two neighbouring river valleys of the Beas and the Tons.

The first chapter lays out the nature of the region's geography and how it impacted the pre-British social formation. The second chapter studies in some detail the economic, political and sociological features which constituted this social formation. Chapter three takes a close look at the foundations of British rule in the region and the impact they had on the extant social formation. Chapter four surveys a series of peasant rebellions over a century to identify the changes in ideology and political practice of the peasantry and chapter five looks at the indicators of this changing social formation. The final chapter gives

details of how the processes unleashed by British rule finally played themselves out at the twilight of independence as the Himalayan peasant constituted himself into a member of the Indian nation.

As I have mentioned above, this book is the culmination of a long process of discovery and I have accumulated intellectual and personal debts too many to fully recount and acknowledge. I must begin by acknowledging the academic guidance provided by my doctoral supervisor, Prof. K. N. Panikkar who gave me the space to pursue divergent ideas which have finally blossomed to form the core arguments of this book.

My father, Javeed Alam, provided the initial inputs which started me off on this journey of discovering the Western Himalayas. Mohar Singh provided innumerable insights and has always been a ready bank of information and ideas for me to draw on. Chetan Singh, with his easy charm, helped me find my feet in the world of Himalayan history. Their ideas and inputs lie scattered throughout this book and are too numerous to fully footnote.

Sumit Sarkar, Hari Sen, Kumaresh Chakravarty, Emma Flatt, Tanika Sarkar and the late Ravinder Kumar read many of the drafts. Their comments and criticisms have been crucial to both strengthening the arguments of this book as well as for providing much needed encouragement. I must thank Vasudha Pande for sharing her experiences of research on the Western Himalayas and introducing me to L.D. Joshi's work. Kaushik Dasgupta not only read the entire draft of both the Ph.D. thesis and this book, but also gave valuable editorial advice.

The research on the thesis took me to various libraries and archives and I would like to thank the staff of the JNU library, the Nehru Memorial Library, the H.P. State Archives, the H.P. Secretariat library, the H.P. University library, the National Archives of India, the British Library's Oriental and India Office Collection, the SOAS library, the library of the South Asia Centre, Cambridge and the library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. I am thankful to Annie Hazarika and Anuradha Ravindra of Foundation Books for being such diligent and patient editors. Thanks also to Tamil Selvan for providing me with the maps.

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my thanks for their help. I also thank the generosity of the Indian Council for Social Science Research who financed my air ticket to London which enabled me to refer to documents housed in the Oriental and India Office collection of the British Library.

Often I have wondered whether I ‘wasted’ my time while I was busy with political activism during my student days and if not for that, whether I may have completed the thesis and this book much earlier. But today, when I look back, I am sure that my associations with SFI and left politics have been important contributors to my academic interests and intellectual development. I also would like to acknowledge the vibrant political atmosphere and stimulating academic culture of Jawaharlal Nehru University which has moulded me as a person. All the late nights, the arguments and discussions, the endless cups of tea and the fun which marked my association with JNU are embodied in the following pages. A big thanks to all my comrades, critics and friends. I must also acknowledge the rigorous academic character of the Centre for Historical Studies, JNU from where I pursued my research.

My wife Manjari has been a constant friend and companion during my research and writing. Her constant support, encouragement and affection, not to mention editing and discussions, have added greatly to my work. My parents have put in so much of their emotional energy into my research that it seems too formal to merely thank them and I don’t have the words to express all that I have to say. Not only my parents but also my grandparents have always stood behind me in all that I have done and together they have provided me with the confidence and strength to pursue my academic and other interests. My daughter, Sara Aparajita, is too little to know that her father has finally finished his book. I only hope that when she eventually gets to read it, she would feel it worthy of her father!

Introduction

This book is the story of the Colonial encounter in the Western Himalayas. The Western Himalayas is a region which has mostly remained outside conventional historical accounts of colonialism in India. The book highlights the geographical and historical *specificity* of the Western Himalayas and its distinctiveness from the *general* account of Indian history.

The book argues that it is not possible to understand colonialism in the Western Himalayas as merely a sub-set of the larger story of colonialism in India. Through a detailed account of the region's geography and social formation, as well as, the various aspects of the colonial encounter, the book tries to argue that the Western Himalayas represented a *border* region between India and China and it was colonialism which integrated it with the Indian Nation. Through this exercise, the book also tries to argue for an alternative way of studying colonialism and modern Indian history.

The predominant tendency among almost all contemporary historians has been to study colonialism as a pan-Indian phenomenon. Every account of colonialism in South Asia, in the different disciplines of social sciences and humanities, works with an implicit notion of India as a given unity from the very beginning of the colonial encounter. I would suggest that this was far from being the case. India was constituted as a country and a nation during the course of colonial rule and in opposition to it.

This is not something original that is being proposed here¹. It has been a long accepted, well-grounded argument with an impressive amount of scholarship to back it up. Its implications – in their impact on the development of the anti-colonial struggles and in the manner this became a national movement – too have been followed up and teased out with remarkable efficacy. While these sociological implications over time have been fleshed out by voluminous research, its implications for the constitution of the ‘space’ of India remain problematic. The social formations of the agricultural communities of the great Indian rivers have implicitly been accepted as representative and normative of India and have been used to underwrite the Colonial histories of all the peoples and territories of the British Raj. At most, qualifications are allowed but no space is left for the existence of completely different social structures.

Large parts of what finally came to be identified as the British Indian Empire lay outside the civilisational centres of the flood plains – *border* areas stretching from Baluchistan to Burma and large areas of hilly, forested and desert tracts dividing these civilisational centres. In most of these zones the social structures of the flood plains did not permeate and their economic or political linkages were marked by high levels of historical autonomy.

While the history of India under colonialism is usually centred on civilisational centres, there have been recent attempts to read the history of areas outside of these. Many of these attempts have been

1. This has been so of much of Indian Historiography of contemporary times. A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay, 1976, Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, Delhi, 1983 and Bipan Chandra, et.al, *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, 1989 are books which take the stand that the Indian Nation was in the making during colonialism. They also contain comprehensive references for the different historiographical positions on this issue.

This position, though, has not been accepted by many nationalist historians who have accepted the existence of an Indian Nation prior to the coming of the British. Two of the most influential histories, from two widely different ideological positions, which work with a concept of an ‘ancient’ Indian Nation are Jawaharlal Nehru’s *Discovery of India* and R.C. Majumdar, H.C. Raychaudhuri and Kalikinkar Datta’s widely used textbook, *An Advanced History of India*, Madras, 1978. Both books were written in the 1940s and have seen innumerable editions and reprints.

from the Subaltern Studies collective, specially the studies of tribal resistance to colonialism in Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*², David Arnold's study of the Gudem-Rampa uprisings³, David Hardiman's *The Coming of the Devi*⁴ and Ramchandra Guha on peasant resistance to commercial forestry⁵.

While these have been substantial contributions to enlarging the area of historical interest, they suffer from two major weaknesses. They implicitly lump all the regions outside of the civilisational centres into one undifferentiated category and they retrieve the history of these areas primarily as the struggle of marginal, oppressed people against the domination and exploitation of the very same civilisational centres and their elites. Thus they unwittingly re-integrate these areas and their people into the larger history of 'India' by keeping their location firmly inside its discursive boundaries.

Let us examine the first point about the lumping of all regions outside the civilisational centres into one category. Within the territorial boundaries of British India there were 'inaccessible' areas within the boundaries of these civilisational centres and then there were areas outside. The hilly and forested zones lying inside the flood plains would be examples of the first while the Thar desert and the 'border' areas would be examples of the second. It is interesting that most of the recent scholarship on marginal regions and people has been confined to the first type. This book tries to study one such 'border' area – the Western Himalayas.

It is the border areas that refuse easy classification⁶. This is primarily because of their Janus type character, which is central to their existence as borders. They have grown over centuries as the physical divides between distinct social formations and have mediated

2. Delhi, 1992.
3. David Arnold, "Rebellious Hillmen: the Gudem-Rampa Risings, 1839–1924", in Ranajit Guha, ed. Subaltern Studies, Vol.1, New Delhi, 1982.
4. Delhi, 1995. There is also the work on the Gudem Rampa hillmen by David Arnold in Ranajit Guha ed., Subaltern Studies, Vol. 1, Delhi, 1981.
5. Ramchandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, Delhi, 1991.
6. The work which has influenced me most in the understanding of borders as a distinct space in historical contexts is Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, New York, 1940.

the contact between them. They rarely, if ever and then only in small pockets, contain sedentary agricultural communities. Rather, mobile populations of pastoralists and traders generally mark them. Some significant geographical feature like mountains, deserts and large plains of low rainfall and insufficient drainage form borders between civilisational cores or centres. Forests too have formed such boundaries but they have been prone to erasure by the iron axes of a growing population and expanding trade and economy within the civilisational centres. But, historically, forests coupled with mountainous terrain have been the most difficult of borders. Immigrations have been possible through the clear desert-like mountains of Afghanistan. Similarly, trade along the 'Silk Route' survived centuries of unrest and warfare in the steppes of Central Asia. But a similar historical movement is missing from the borders which stretch from Kashmir's South to the mountains of Burma due to the combination of difficult topography and climate with dense forests.

One can work out a rough and ready distinction between those border areas which have been passages between neighbouring civilisational zones and those which have remained relatively untouched by contact with the riparian civilisations. The Himalaya mountains would be good examples of this second type of border.

It will be a central argument of this book that it is not possible to study the Western Himalayas as a part of the historical processes of the Indian sub-continent till after many decades into British rule. It followed a historical path which was removed from the rhythms of the Indo-Gangetic cultures, though it imbibed some features of the latter – both material and ideological – like it also did of the Tibetan plateau. The integration of the Himalayan region into the Indian Nation was a specific feature of colonial rule and it is methodologically impermissible to extrapolate the social features, which are markers of this successful integration, to a period when this process had not even begun.

Use of the concept 'caste' has been the thin edge of the wedge that has opened the door to scholars for the wholesale entry of alien sociological concepts to understand the social formation of the region. Its use has been greatest in the sociological and anthropological works which have been the only forms of academic enquiry in the Western Himalayas for the last half a century. It is very common to find the

word caste used, by nineteenth century British writers to refer to any social division in the Western Himalayas, without much conceptual clarity. They use this word interchangeably with others like tribe, people, class, race, clan, group, community, etc. in these sources. It has therefore become easier to read caste into these sources for present day researchers.

In the following pages we shall look at the manner in which caste has been used and the difficulties it creates to a proper understanding of the region's history as well as its present social structure.

All over the cis-Himalayan region, the Simla States, the Doon valley, Kullu and Kangra valleys there exists a hierarchy of social status, though the rigidity of the caste system as in the plains does not exist. The upper class consists of Brahmins and Rajputs (Kshatriyas)...the lower strata is composed of innumerable social groups who form the artisan elements in the population of these parts... These suffer from a number of disabilities and are treated as serfs or dependants....⁷

While this statement is a fairly accurate, though a simplified, description of the social divisions of the Western Himalayas, Berreman, like most other writers on the region, makes caste the central category for understanding the region's social structure⁸. He accepts that unlike the "three fold (twice-born, Shudra, untouchable) if not fivefold (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, untouchable)" caste division found in the plains, one can only notice a two fold division in this region which is along the lines of the Khashas and the Doms (artisans). He further remarks on the absence of any significant social distance between the various sub-castes, which are also not endogamous. Ritual purity too does not play any significant role in the relations between the two castes, or their sub-castes, except in the case of some families of orthodox Brahmins and some groups of carcass removers and leather workers⁹. It is also evident from his

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7. D. N. Majumdar, *The Fortunes of Primitive Tribes*, Lucknow, 1944, pg.137, quoted in Gerald D. Berreman, *Hindus of the Himalayas*, Delhi, 1997, pg. 200.
 8. "There can be no doubt that we are dealing with a caste society", Gerald D. Berreman, ibid. Even Ramchandra Guha, op.cit. uses caste as the central sociological category of the region.
 9. Ibid.

study that the form of the family and the nature of marriage ceremonies do not differ much between the Himalayan Brahmins and the village menials.

Caste has remained the basic category for describing and understanding the social formation of the Western Himalayas in most other works that have come out since this study by Berreman. This acceptance of caste as the basis of social organisation has also been accompanied by important qualifications about the flexibility of the institution, the absence of purity as an important marker of caste distinction, the whole range of unorthodox social and religious practices and so forth. But this has not led to a re-consideration of the category of caste. There are two broad reasons for this adherence to the category of caste to describe and understand Western Himalayan social organisation.

The first and most important of these two reasons is that most of the important works have been located within the boundaries of the twin disciplines of anthropology and sociology. The structure of their methodology tends to privilege the present over the past, especially in situations where there is not sufficient secondary material to easily historicise the localised data of direct field observation. By the time of the end of British rule, perhaps caste had become the most important category of social organisation within the communities of Himalayan peasants, even though its form was far from 'perfect'¹⁰. Many traces of a non-caste social organisation still remained strong, while there was a conscious, organised effort on the part of both the local communities and the larger Indian nation to remove the more glaring of these social heterodoxies which were prevalent in the region. These will be described and discussed in later chapters, especially when we look at the attempts to reform the polyandrous family. It is therefore highly probable that respondents to direct observers would hide aspects, which were not considered respectable anymore and highlight those features that were considered more honourable and normal. The importance of caste in the self-consciousness of the

10. The absence of what are termed 'intermediary agricultural castes' or OBCs should normally alert the researcher to the possibility of a different social structure than what is found in the Gangetic plain. Unfortunately this has not been the case and such 'discrepancies' have been evened out by introducing qualifications.

Himalayan peasantry in the twentieth century gets reflected in the writings of most of the researchers of the Western Himalayas.

There would be no dispute if caste were given the importance it has been, for describing and understanding the social organisation of the region in the twentieth century, specially for the post Independence period, if this category was accompanied by an awareness of the history of its emergence. By positing a seeming timelessness and normativity to the existence of caste in the Western Himalayas, such writings totally falsify the region's historical sociology and render suspect much of their understanding and explanation. The problem gets compounded because observations of the present are made the basis for a-historical conceptualisations of the nature of indigenous social organisation.

The other reason for this uncritical acceptance of caste as the basis of social organisation is the prevalent perspective which views the Himalayas as an integral part of the processes of Indian history and not as a borderland, both physically and at a socio-cultural level. There is a strong historiographical tendency to view the pre-British period of all the territories that subsequently came under the control of the British Government of India as part of the pre-colonial history of the Indian Nation. Therefore all works begin their discussion of the region after reviewing the literature on social organisation of (North) India – which basically implies the flood plains of the Indo-Gangetic valley – and extend arguments and hypotheses contained in them to the Western Himalayas. Often qualifications forced by the nature of their actual observations are made to the categories of caste and family but they still retain their unmistakable non-Himalayan stamp. It will be the argument of this book that it is not possible to study the Western Himalayas as a part of the historical processes of the Indian sub-continent till after many decades into British rule. It followed a historical path which was removed from the rhythms of the Indo-Gangetic cultures, though it imbibed some features of the latter – both material and ideological – like it also did of the Tibetan plateau. The integration of the Himalayan region into the Indian Nation was a specific feature of colonial rule and it is methodologically impermissible to extrapolate the social features, which are markers of this successful integration, to a period when this process had not even begun.

The attempt in the first two chapters of the book has been to try and detail the deep points of divergence, both physical and social, between the Western Himalayas and the plains of North India. On the basis of this assertion the argument of the remaining four chapters has been fleshed out. These four chapters collectively chart out the broad parameters of the establishment of British rule in the Western Himalayas and the consequent political and economic merger with the Colonial Empire, the ruptures and transformations and the manner in which the region became part of the Indian Nation.

One central argument of the book is that the Colonial experience in the Western Himalayas was, for the most part, non-cataclysmic. There was no large scale uprooting of established political entities or disruption of political processes in short time-spans. No radical change in economic activities was imposed nor was there a sudden dislocation of established economic agents. There was no attempt to impose social or cultural codes either. In fact, as chapter three shows, even the British settlements were far removed from the local habitations and thus there was minimal physical contact.

It is not my contention that the British and their rule were innately benevolent or beneficial. What the book tries to argue and substantiate is that the geographical and historical conditions of the Western Himalayas on the one hand, and the imperatives and demands of British rule, on the other, were such that large-scale, cataclysmic confrontations were circumvented as one witnesses in the Gangetic plains.

This does not imply that there were no points of confrontation and disputes. In fact, rebellions were a central feature of the local polity and continued with vigour under British rule as chapter four fleshes out. A vigorous Praja Mandal movement also emerged in the 1930s-40s and was affiliated to the larger Nationalist freedom struggle. The point which is being made here is that British rule did not disrupt local processes nor destroy local structures of economic, social and political power at the very moment of the establishment of their rule.

The structure of the book has deliberately been kept close to a “classic” historical narrative which spends more time describing the “facts” and historical processes, rather than one which engages in historiographical contestations. The argument about the non-cataclysmic nature of British rule is largely implicit in this narrative,

as is the argument about the sociological distance of the Western Himalayas from ‘India’. This narrative method has been adopted in an attempt to draw readers into the world of the Himalayan peasant in a reasonably “neutral” manner and enable them to work out for themselves whether this understanding of the nature of contact between the Himalayan peasant and British rule is adequate to explain the Colonialism in this region.

Chapter One tries to illustrate the extent to which the physical features of the region dispersed the populations and economic resources and became an insurmountable barrier both for economic and political consolidation. It tries to bring out the manner in which the basic physical world of the Himalayas was so different from that of the riparian plains. While this seems self evident, a study of the region’s geography becomes important since it is by carefully marking the differences and noting the specificities of the physical world and the structures of human interaction with it that the further study of the social formation becomes possible.

But these physical features, which literally dwarfed the human populations of the region, also slowed down the normal rhythms of historical processes. Those processes of transformation to agriculture from either foraging and gathering, or from pastoralism, which ‘played’ themselves out and were ‘completed’ in the more malleable physical zones of the Indo-Gangetic plains, became stunted in the Western Himalayas and, in a sense, froze in time. The transition from Lineage to State, which has so illuminatingly been described by Romila Thapar for the North Indian plains, could not complete itself in the Western Himalayas, even though there is evidence that this process had already begun in the first millennium of the Christian era.

The **second chapter**, the largest in the book, delineates the main features of the pre-British social formation of the Western Himalayas. It looks at aspects of demography, organisation of productive activities, development of political institutions and characteristics of social relations. The attempt in the first two chapters is to paint those features that characterise the social formation of the region while, at the same time, mark out its basic difference from those social and economic features which are considered normative for ‘India’.

Therefore, one can say that apart from being primitive at the time of first contact with the Colonial State, the social formation of the

Western Himalayas was also in a state of flux defined by a constant struggle between the structures and agents of historically distinct economic and political forces. The daily life of the people was largely conditioned by the parameters of this “struggle”. It may be possible to argue that when the Colonial State entered and took control of this historical stage, their actions would not have been deeply contested since negotiating these changes could easily become part of the ‘normal’ processes of life in the mountains.

Apart from not being cataclysmic, British rule provided the enabling conditions for the social and political integration of the region with the emergent Indian Nation. These conditions of integration can be divided into three broad categories – the political and economic, the social and cultural, and the movemental.

In the first category one can include stabilisation of political relations with Hill States through the Sanads, introduction of money and markets, establishment of the European ‘Hill Stations’ and the settlement of agricultural land and forests. All of these had been concluded by the beginning of the twentieth century. The second category of enabling conditions of integration with India were establishment of schools and courts, the opening up of communications, first with roads and then with newspapers, telegraphs, phones and railways, increased travel to and extended residence in the Western Himalayas of people from other parts of the British Indian Raj. The “movemental” conditions were the peasant rebellions which pockmarked the entire century from the 1850s onward and later explicitly nationalist Praja Mandal movement in the 1940s.

The **third chapter** discusses in some detail the first category of enabling conditions listed above and the consequences of each of these. What is of note is the initial distance the British maintained with the populace and economic resources of the region. While they had gained full control over the region east of the river Sutlej in 1815-16, the first land settlement was carried out in the early 1850s and the first forest survey only in 1861.

The importance of the Western Himalayas to the political takeover of Punjab and for providing possible passages to China and Russia provided the initial impetus for the redcoats to take their arms into these forbidding mountains. Their importance as temperate sanatoria

within the imperial scheme of things was a later discovery and was, to a large extent, the consequence of private initiatives by individual British officials who built houses there. It was only in 1865 that Simla became the summer seat of the British Indian Government. Similarly commercial forestry took three to four decades to establish itself as an economic activity of imperial importance. The impact of British rule on the region in the first few decades was relatively insignificant because of this disinterest in the local resources and populations. It is important to remember this facet of the colonial history of the Western Himalayas since it colours the very nature of British rule.

While the conquest of the Western Himalayas may have been for ‘extraneous’ reasons and official disinterest and distance may have marked the early decades, by the second half of the nineteenth century the very structure of British rule initiated unprecedented changes reaching deep into the region’s economy and political structure. Once initiated, these changes developed a momentum of their own. Later these changes were sought to be patterned on the ideas of British policy. These transformed the very basis of life for the local populations and were often incomprehensible at the moment of their impact. Rebellions and similar acts were the primary means with which the Himalayan peasants greeted these changes in their life. The **fourth chapter** discusses some important rebellions spread over a period of almost a hundred years. These try to identify the main features of peasant rebellions in the Western Himalayas while at the same time trying to trace their changing nature. The chapter also outlines how the relation of the Himalayan Hill States with the British changed under pressure of these rebellions and how the rebellions also transformed major aspects of Colonial ideology and policy.

While rebellions were the most visible form in which the Himalayan peasant came to terms with the transformations initiated by colonial rule, there were other less visible processes. Reform of the Himalayan family became the primary route for integration with the specific Indian society that was emerging under, and in contest with, colonialism. In fact, if the chapter on rebellions looks at the contestory aspect of the integration, **chapter five** studies the manner in which quiet undercurrents redefined social structures of the region to make them more compatible with a unified Indian nation. Not only does it study marriage reforms, which formed the cornerstone of social

reforms, it also looks at the pattern of literacy, occupational structure and the changes in popular theophany to get a feel of the wide ranging nature of social transformations that were being witnessed in the Western Himalayas.

The **sixth and final chapter** studies the moment of the final integration of the region with India in the course of independence. The struggles-both factional and popular-which led up to August 1947 and further into the formation of Himachal Pradesh, marked the emergence of the region's dominant social groups as partners in the Indian nation through their control over its political and social life. This final chapter also tries to outline the social basis for the divisions which became apparent at the very moment that the Himalayan proprietary peasant entered the arena of the Indian nation.

One is tempted to see the history of British rule in the Western Himalayas as a story of successful integration of the regions' people with the Indian nation. The extension of the market, the success of social reforms and the Praja Mandal movements all indicate this. Complete economic integration did not take place till the horticultural revolution of the 1960s and it is only in the first year of this century that half of the Western Himalayas – left out of Himachal Pradesh due to politics within the Praja Mandal in the 1940s – managed to wrest some form of equality and autonomy for its dominant groups in the form of a separate State of Uttarakhand.

CHAPTER ONE

The Geography of the Western Himalayas

The Himalayas have been an integral part of the geographical knowledge of Indian civilisations since at least the Vedic period. Their significance as cultural and religious icons and as the source of the perennial rivers of the North Indian plains, which sustained its agriculture and human settlements, was recognised from the earliest times. Their importance as a line of defence and as a defining physical boundary separating India from its neighbours in the North and East was also acknowledged.¹ This knowledge of the Himalayas was not confined to the peoples of the Indo-Gangetic plains but got diffused till the southern most corner of the peninsula as early as the period of the Sangam Literature.² This knowledge remained for most of the

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1. Binod S. Das, 'The Himalayan Frontier from the Sanskrit Sources', in N.K. Ray ed., *Himalayan Frontier in Historical Perspective*, Calcutta, 1986. In the Vedic literature we find references to the main rivers of the Western Himalayas and a reasonable knowledge of their origin and course. The Chandra Bhaga or Chenab was known to the Vedic people as Asikni, the Ravi was known as the Parushni to the Vedic people and as the Iravati to later writers, the Beas was known as Arjikiya in Vedic times and as the Vipasa in later Sanskrit sources, the Sutlej was known as Sutudri in the Vedic period and as Shatadru in later sources. There are also references to the land of the Jalandhara which corresponds to the watershed between the Beas and the Sutlej and to Kuluta which seems to refer to the Kullu of later sources.
 2. K.Sadasivan, 'The Himalayas in Early Tamil Literature', in N.K.Ray ed., *Ibid.*

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historical period merely as ‘knowledge of the Himalayas’ and could not become ‘knowledge about the Himalayas’ till the coming of the British and their conquest of the Western Himalayas in 1815. Even after so many years ‘knowledge about the Himalayas’ has remained perfunctory, scattered and slow in its spread within the educational and policy making institutions of India. It is still common to find generalisations made on the basis of geographical contexts which are alien to the region.

Therefore, this chapter has two purposes. The first is to describe and define the topographical, climatic and other natural aspects of the Western Himalayas, which make it a unique ecological niche of the South Asian region. This will enable a fuller understanding of the various social and economic processes, which followed the consolidation of British rule. But the second, and main, purpose is to underline the possible unfounded assumptions about the geographical context which are derived from societies of the plains and which frequently lead to misunderstandings and mis-representations about hill society, even among some well researched and insightful works. The manner of human interaction with the natural context needs special emphasis and is described in the second part of this chapter.

First, the physical setting of the Western Himalayas, which would include relief, drainage, climate, soil and natural vegetation is discussed. After this we will discuss the human or cultural setting which would include population profiles, settlement patterns, geographical locales of agriculture and pastoralism and the patterns of trade and communications is discussed. This chapter ends with an initial attempt at a historical understanding of the development of sub regions within the Western Himalayas.

The Physical Setting

The Himalayas are the youngest and, geologically, the most active of the mountain chains of the world. They were formed due to large horizontal movements of landmasses and their eventual collision. They exhibit all those land forms which develop when earth strata are intensely folded – anticlinal ridges, synclinal valleys, overfolds and recumbent folds. Intermontane plateaux and large sized basins are conspicuous by their absence, due to the youth of the mountains and

the relatively little time that the forces of degradation have had to shape the features of these mountains.³ The Himalayas are usually divided into three zones – the Western zone stretching from Kashmir to the border of Kumaon and Nepal, the Central zone approximating to present day Nepal, and the Eastern zone from the hills of Sikkim and Darjiling till the Himalayas meet the hills of Burma and south west Tibet beyond the valley of the Bramhaputra.⁴ The Himalayas, with one exception, are not cut through by any river due to their altitude and youth; the passage of the Indus and the Bramhaputra being possible only at the Western and Eastern extremities of the chain (both the rivers, supposed to be remnants of the Tethys Sea, having to traverse, in opposite directions, the entire northern aspect of the range from their common source in and around the Mansarovar lake). The only exception to this is the river Sutlej that cuts through to form a valley, which has historically been of immense human importance as one of the easiest access ways through the mountains for traders and others, and will also be the setting for the present study.

Relief and Drainage

In the spring of 1850, the difficulty of access to Simla, the administrative and monetary problems of using Begar labour for carrying the increasing baggage of Britishers to Simla and the possibility of accessing Tibet, combined to attract the attention of Lord Dalhousie, Governor General of India, to the need to build a road from the plains of Punjab through the Himalayas connecting Simla and reaching on to the borders of Tibet.⁵ The report of Capt. Briggs who completed this project between 1850 to 1855, provides a fascinating

3. R.L. Singh ed., India: A Regional Geography, Varanasi, 1971, pp. 392–398; also see Gopal Singh, *A Geography of India*, Delhi, 1979, pg. 6; S.C. Bose, *Geography of the Himalaya*, N. Delhi, National Book Trust, 1972, pp. 2,4; K.L. Joshi, *Geography of Himachal Pradesh*, India, National Book Trust, 1984, pg. 7.

4. S.C.Bose, *Ibid.*, pg. 17.

5. Captain D. Briggs, *Report of the Operations Connected with the Hindostan and Thibet Road, From 1850 to 1855*, Selections from the Records of the Government of India, (Public Works Department), No. XVI, Oriental and India Office Collections of the British Library (henceforth OIOC), Pg. 1.

4 *Becoming India*

account of the stark physical relief of the Himalayas which provided, perhaps, the greatest barrier, till date, to Her Majesty's Public Works Department in India:

To those who have examined the Himalayas, it will be known that they confirm to a system of river basins, and dividing ridges, generally extending at right angles to the main chain. These ridges, from their numerous subordinate ramifications, (each pair of which form their own tributary basin) present to the uninitiated eye a confused mass without system or arrangement. Yet, between each principal artery, exists a connected chain of Mountains from the snowy range to the plains of Hindostan. Between the Sutledge and the Ganges, there are four such connected ridges, forming the watershed lines between the four great rivers, the Sutledge, the Tonse, the Jumna, and the Ganges.⁶

Capt. Briggs went on to show that the watershed ridge of the Sutlej and the Tons provided the best line for the proposed road, not merely because it connected the emerging town of Simla, but also because by following the valley of the Sutlej at points where the road met the barrier of the principal mountain ranges (the 'subordinate ramifications' of the above quote), it could access Tibet with relative ease; thus confirming the continued importance of the Sutlej valley as a travel route even in the era of relatively modern techniques of road building.

The Western Himalayas can be divided into three main ranges which run broadly parallel to each other and divide the region into distinct climatic zones, based primarily on their altitude which rises from the south to the north and form the west to the east. These three physiographic divisions from the south to north are (i) Outer Himalayas or the Shiwaliks, (ii) Lesser Himalayas or the Central Zone, (iii) Great Himalayas and Zanskar or the Northern Zone⁷. These ranges run in a north-westerly to south-easterly direction and rise in altitude from the plains to the Tibetan plateau. They are joined by various transverse ridges, which also form the watersheds between the rivers of the region and their tributaries. Except for the Sutlej, which cuts

6. Captain D. Briggs, *Ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

7. R.L. Singh ed., op.cit., *Varanasi*, 1971, pg.397. The rest of the chapter dealing with the physical setting is based on this book and K.L.Joshi, op.cit. Specific facts and quotations from these would be separately referred to.

through the Great Himalayan range none of the rivers dissect the mountain ranges but they rather follow a course through the troughs between the parallel ranges. These mountain ranges and the transverse ridges form the basins for all the rivers of the Western Himalayas and each valley remains isolated from the other and feeds its waters to its main drainage channel.

This relative isolation of river valleys due to the high mountain ranges separating them has meant that each such valley, along with its tributary valleys has developed self-contained ecological and social structures which have a high degree of similarity without much historical contact.⁸ G.C. Barnes, Commissioner and Superintendent Cis Sutlej states, an officer who had all his previous experience in the plains, wrote this about Bushahr state (Bussahir) in the Sutlej valley when he went there for the first time in 1859:

Bussahir is indeed a difficult country to bring under more civilised rules. It lies amidst the most elevated ranges of the Himalaya; snowy ridges divide one portion from another, and the valley of the Sutlej is almost the only route by which to penetrate into the interior. Half of the population belongs to a different type of man, and speak a different language from the other half.⁹

In a similar vein, Lt. George Francis White, who published his travelogue along with prints of sketches of the Himalayas in 1836, writes about the people in the valley of the Tons, parallel to the Sutlej river

Indeed, it was often surprising to observe the total ignorance they (the hill villagers) betrayed on almost every subject unconnected with their own little community, being often unacquainted with the names, or even the existence, of villages a few days journey from their own.¹⁰

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8. K.L.Joshi, op.cit., pg. 9. see also page 16, 'In olden times, the graziers, stray travellers and muleteers crossed them (mountain passes) acting as the sole social links between the isolated populations of the adjoining valleys.'
 9. G.C.Barnes, *Memorandum on the district of Bussahir, and the Pacification of the Disaffected Portion of its Inhabitants*, Selections From the Records of the Punjab Government, Vol.V, No.4, Pp. 108–109.
 10. George Francis White, *Views in India, chiefly among the Himalaya Mountains*, Paris and London, 1836, pg. 98. also relevant is this sentence

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While the main ranges delineate the physical frame, the valleys between them have been settled by man and have emerged as distinct cultural areas. In the highland areas of the region, the valleys are deep and narrow and remain only as water gaps, providing few possibilities for agriculture or other human activity. In the lower areas, below 2,000 metres, the relief features are relatively simpler, depositional landforms consisting of valley flats and terraces, alluvial fans and inter-alluvial plateaux. These valleys can be divided into three categories on the nature of their relief features and their capability of sustaining human settlements.¹¹

The first are the valleys that are from 40 to 65 kilometres long and from 8 to 13 kilometres broad. These are found only in the foothills of the Himalayas and do not strictly come inside the Himalayan region, but are important since they border it and have strong historical links with the areas under study. The second are the valleys found along the middle Himalayas and are strictly linear, with a reduced breadth and relatively steep gradients of the hills which encompass them. The third category of valleys are around minor hill torrents making culs-de-sac where small and isolated populations survive through intensive agriculture combined with other economic activities like pastoralism, trade, etc. Most of the valleys of the middle and inner Himalayas show 'massive rocky outcrops and rugged precipices' while the valleys themselves are 'deeply incised'.¹² These valleys of difficult access in the inner and middle Himalayas made one of the earliest British administrators, G.C. Barnes, despair of enforcing a land settlement in cash and he identified the area's physical and cultural isolation as the principle cause for his pessimism.¹³

from Captain Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India, Including a Walk over the Himalaya Mountains*, 2 Vols., London, 1832, pg. 231, "I have found every village situated between such high ranges of hills that its inhabitants must be completely cut off from communication with their neighbours, of whom they never seem to think."

11. K.L.Joshi, op.cit., pg. 20.

12. K.L.Joshi, *Ibid*.

13. G.C.Barnes, op.cit., Pg. 94. Inspite of his pessimism at the possibility of 'scientific' land settlement, he was able to report positively to his superiors within less than two years at the growing acceptability of cash.

Climate

For the early Europeans the most important factor of the Himalayas was the climate which excited their interest and propelled the rush to set up summer residences there.

From the first of April till July the climate is lovely and then begin the heavy rains, oftentimes violent, which end only about the middle of September. From then till the snow falls, sometimes as late as January, the climate is perfect – a clear still atmosphere, with a bright blue sky and a bracing air.¹⁴

This popular British perception, which has persisted till date, of a ‘highly salubrious climate ... in consequence of its lower temperature’,¹⁵ originated because almost all the British settlements which came up were on the top of the ridges in the middle Himalayas and had climatic features which correspond to what prevails in Northern Europe. While this description is broadly true of parts of the middle Himalayas, other more mobile Britishers realised that even in this region, altitude and aspect dramatically affect the climate. Lt. George Francis White notes:

But in the Himalayas every kind of climate is to be found; and by ascending or descending the mountains, the inhabitants can pass through a variety of temperatures; and by a few days, or sometimes even hours journey, they may exchange the heat of Bengal for the cold of Russia.¹⁶

The region of the Western Himalayas lies in the same latitudes as the Mediterranean climatic zone of West Asia and gets its winter precipitation as a consequence of depressions originating there. The

We must also remember that the Sutlej valley was one of the more monetised of the regions of the Western Himalayas when the British arrived in 1815. This monetisation was due to the large volume of trade while the monetisation of the Bhageerathi valley, further east, was due to the large number of Hindu pilgrims who went to Gangotri for many centuries.

14. Mrs. W.L.Scott, *Views in the Himalayas, Drawn on the Spot*, London, 1852, Introductory note, Para 6.
15. Edward Thornton, *A Gazetteer of the Territories Under the Government of the East India Company, and of the Native States on the Continent of India, 1858*, reprint Delhi, 1993, pg. 895. henceforth *Gazetteer of India, 1858*.
16. Lieut. George Francis White, op.cit., pg. xiv.

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other defining influence on the climate of the region is the Monsoon. But the most important factors, which need to be taken into consideration when discussing climate at any given spot, are altitude and aspect.¹⁷ The climate varies from the hot and sub-humid tropical in the southern low tracts to temperate, then cold, alpine and finally glacial as one moves towards the eastern and northern high mountains. The monsoon also follows a similar pattern with the rainfall decreasing from the low and eastern parts as one moves towards the higher altitudes and towards the west.¹⁸ The important markers of the region's climatic pattern are the snowline, the limit of the glaciers, the limit of the monsoon, the relative altitude of the observer's position vis-à-vis the valley and the angle of the terrain towards the sun.

Snow falls above 1,500 metres in winters but does not stay for long below 2,200 to 2,500 metres. At elevations of 3,000 metres and above the snow usually stays for about four months and is about three metres deep. Above 4,600 metres it is the region of perpetual snow¹⁹. But a source from the nineteenth century says that in Simla, altitude 2,000 metres, in February 1836 the snow was 8 to 9 feet high and stayed on the north facing slopes till the end of May.²⁰ It is difficult to identify the cause of this change in weather pattern since the early nineteenth century till today with much certainty, though extensive deforestation is commonly accepted as an important factor, if not the decisive one. The amount of snowfall and the time it stays on the ground determines the range of crops that can be grown and the number and timing of the harvests that can be extracted. In the higher altitudes the closeness of the glaciers and their position with relation to the villages and pastures determines the grazing season and the location of agricultural plots. Glaciers can be found in the region above 4,000 metres, though they are not common before 4,500 metres, where

17. K.L. Joshi, op.cit., pg.29, 'Far greater is the part played by altitudinal and topographical variations which modify all extra regional influences and generate more appropriately the mountainous type of climate.' Also see R.L. Singh, op.cit. pg. 400; S.C. Bose, op.cit. pp. 45–6;

18. S.C. Bose, op.cit. pg. 47.

19. R.L. Singh, op.cit. pg. 400.

20. *Gazetteer of India, 1858*, pg. 895.

they flow down from the mountains of perpetual snow.²¹ In this intermediate area are found the grasslands.

The entire Western Himalayas, from the foothills till the southern face of the Great Himalayan range experience monsoon rainfall. As mentioned earlier, the rainfall decreases, with one or two exceptions, from the east towards the west. The greatest rain is at the foothills of the main ranges, that is the Shiwaliks, the south and east facing slopes of the Lesser Himalayas and the Great Himalayas when the Monsoon clouds hit these hills and large quantities of cloud gather there. The barrier of the Great Himalayan range is at no point penetrated by the Monsoon and thus one finds a dramatic change in climate, vegetation and human culture beyond these mountains. At certain places the mountain topography is such that the clouds get trapped and thus, these places get quantitatively more rain than neighbouring areas in the vicinity. Most places also get winter precipitation either as snow or rain, which depends not only on the altitude but also on the angle to the sun. In valleys where the winter day is not longer than a few fleeting hours, it would not be uncommon to find snow, while on a nearby hill slope at a higher altitude one may never encounter snow. In the Shiwaliks and middle Himalayas there is usually more rain and less snow due to more sun on the slopes that face the south. In the higher reaches of the mountains, the snow stays longer in the south facing slopes, since the winter sun hardens it and makes it more resistant to thawing.²²

To estimate the climate of a place one also needs to take account of its relative position vis-à-vis the valley and the ridge or mountain peak. This is because of the phenomenon of 'gravity winds'.²³ The daily cooling and heating of the atmosphere creates winds local to each valley, when they blow down into the valley after the sun goes beyond the hills in the late afternoon and evenings, and when they blow up again in the morning. At some places, this wind becomes so violent that it becomes difficult to stand or walk against this wind. These gravity winds are specific to each valley and, keeping all the

21. Gopal Singh, op.cit. pg. 450.

22. S.C. Bose, op.cit. pg. 47; K.L. Joshi, op.cit. pp. 29–30; R.L. Singh, op.cit. pg. 400.

23. S.C. Bose, *Ibid*; R.L. Singh, *Ibid*.

other factors in mind, it may be said that local site factors such as the location of ridges and valleys, the direction of the spur and even the shape of the mountain folds all contribute to the formation of the climate of any given spot in the Western Himalayas. The peak of Jakhu overlooking the town of Simla gets much heavier snow than the town proper, while the villages in the valley below the town never ever get snow even in the most severe winter.

Soils

In a region of such great topographical and climatic variation it is not surprising to find different kinds of soils. On the whole, one can say that the region's soils are young and thin and thus unstable, except in the larger valleys where the soil of the slopes has come and deposited itself.²⁴ The British administrators divided the region's soils into three main categories, each of two classes, for the purpose of land revenue assessment.²⁵ These three categories were the Kiar, the Bakhali, and the Karali. The Kiar was the most fertile and well-irrigated land and usually grew rice at Rabi and maize at Kharif. Bakhali was the manured land near the homestead, and dependent on natural precipitation for its harvests, though some of this land also received water through irrigation. In the lower and middle hills Bakhali land gave two harvests and one harvest in the higher reaches. Karali was land that was either newly reclaimed waste or old soil which lay at some distance from the village. Thus, it was never irrigated or well manured and provided one annual harvest at its best, and had often to be kept fallow. It was also exposed to the ravages of wild animals and cold weather. While the soil of the Himalayan foothills is embedded with stones, the mid and high hill soil consists of silty or clay loam. The soil of the areas beyond the Great Himalayan range is of a 'high texture' variety and low in organic content consistent with its categorisation as 'cold desert'.²⁶

24. R.L. Singh, op.cit., pg.405.

25. *Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States*, 1910, (reprinted New Delhi, 1995), Bashahr State, pg. 46. These land classifications were based on the prevalent categories in the hills and merely codified them into the form necessary for the Land Settlement to take place.

26. R.L. Singh, *Ibid.*

Natural Vegetation

Before the coming of the British the whole region had perhaps the greatest forests of the South Asian subcontinent. These forests, due to their location and topography, were inaccessible to those who carried out the extensive forest clearing for settled agriculture during the iron age. They were not molested for all these centuries by the local populations since these were scattered and small, and their implements were rudimentary.²⁷ The natural vegetation of the region varied with the climatic zone and there was found flora from the sub-tropical type to the temperate, the alpine and the highland grass meadows that merged with the line of eternal snow.²⁸ The slopes along the big rivers and at the higher end of the mountains were covered with trees of various types. Most of the original forests were found on the south and east facing slopes, where there was greater rain and sun, though exceptions were common due to the 'micro climate' of certain areas.

The tree line of the Himalayas in this region is reached at about 4,000 metres and the snow line is reached at around 4,600 metres,²⁹ the altitudes lying in between these two limits being the zone of the Himalayan meadows.

The trees of the Western Himalayas can be classified into two broad categories, the deciduous forests and the coniferous forests.³⁰ They became important markers of the distinct types of trees which were useful to the local population as fuel wood, as building material for houses, tools and implements, and by providing leaves for grazing the cattle and the herds of sheep and goats, and those which were

27. The single most important source for studying the pattern of forests in the Western Himalayas from the Yamuna till the Hindu Kush is H. Cleghorn, *Report upon the Forests of the Punjab and the Western Himalaya*, Roorkee, n.d. This survey was carried out in 1861 and the report was published either in 1864 or 1865. Most of this section is written from this report, additional references being separately mentioned. About the nature of the local implements for cutting trees and working on wood also see Lieut. George Francis White, op.cit. pg. 61.

28. R.L. Singh, op.cit. pp.403-05.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

useful to the British as sources of timber for commercial forestry.³¹ The first category would mainly consist of broad leaf trees like the many varieties of oak, sal, walnut, maple, horse chestnut, etc. In the second type are primarily the blue pine (Deodar), the long needle pine (Chir), and the *Cedrus Deodara* (Kail/Kelu). These trees provided good timber and could also be floated down the streams, whereas trees like the oak could not float in water and thus, had no commercial value till the roads reached well into the interior in the decades after independence. Most of the trees of the deciduous type were crucial to the livelihood of the people, while the conifers were the preferred type for the Forest Department, though pines and deodars were also used traditionally by the hillmen to build houses and other structures. The forests were also important to the local population because their undergrowth provided essential grazing to the cattle, which had to stay close to the homestead for purposes of agriculture and milk, and which had to be provided for during the difficult months of winter.³²

Of the various plants and trees which were found in the Himalayas some were 'domesticated' by the peasants for purposes of agriculture and human consumption. These were mostly local flora which had been adapted for human needs, though it may be possible to identify those species which 'migrated' from other ecological zones and adapted to the climate of the region, such research, about their integration into the agricultural and ecological cycle, is lacking at the moment. This classification can be looked at another way and that is the distinction between those plants which had economic use for the local population and those which were of no or peripheral importance. Many plants of the latter category gained importance as cash crops after the arrival of the British. These plants provided cash crops that were supplied to British markets in hill stations, and to the rest of

31. The best account of this divide brought about in the Western Himalayas is the book by Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, Delhi, 1989. This book confines its discussion to the similar and adjoining area of Garhwal and Kumaon. Many references to this are to be found in the British sources of the Punjab Hill States; G.C. Barnes, op.cit. pp. 127-8; see Capt. D. Briggs, op.cit. pp.24-8.

32. Capt. D. Briggs, *Ibid.*

India.³³ Fruits like apple, apricot, mulberry, fig, pear, peach and green gage grew wild and though they were known as edible, they were not part of the regular diet of the people, being resorted to during food shortages and long journeys. Strawberry, raspberry, currant and gooseberry were fruits which were eaten.

Human Setting

It seems that the Western Himalayas have had human inhabitation since around the late stone age, implements of which period have been found, not only in the Shiwalik foothills but also deeper into the river valleys and hills. Agriculture and pastoralism have remained the central components of the productive activities of the people. These along with trade, in the large river valleys, have provided the basis for the development of the Hill State as we find it at the time of the coming of the British. Here discussion is confined to those features of the engagement of the hillmen with their environment, which provide clues to understand the geographical imperatives on the history of the region. It is common to find limits that the environment sets on the historical possibilities of a region; what is specific about this region of the Western Himalayas is that there was no one environmental context that the people had to contend with, and any stable human settlement had to gear itself towards economic activities which were spread over at least two, and often, three ecological-climatic zones and equally diverse topography. The appreciation of this feature of the Western Himalayas for the development of historical social formations needs special emphasis if one has to correctly evaluate the nuances of the transformations brought about by British rule.

33. Most travelogues and British accounts of the nineteenth century comment on the spread of fruit and vegetable cultivation answering the demand of the market in the British hill stations. Later the gazetteers also describe the same process in their description of agriculture. Potato was introduced into the hills by James Baillie Fraser during the military campaign against the Gurkhas in 1815 and had spread to many areas of the hills by the 1840s. See Capt. Thomas Skinner, op.cit., Vol 1, pg. 283; and Mrs. W.L.L. Scott, op.cit., Introductory note on Spontaneous and Agricultural Production, for the earliest references to this process.

Demographic Profiles

When the British first came to control the affairs of the Western Himalayas after 1815, they found large parts of the region depopulated due to the continual warfare during Gurkha rule (1893–1815) which also caused internal migrations of people within the region.³⁴ The early assessments and enumerations suffered from frequent understatement of population and resources from a people wary of war ravages, even when British administrators overcame the barriers of physical isolation and cultural distance. It is, therefore, not very easy to estimate the population of this region at the time when the British rule began and for quite some time after that. The undependability of early British estimates of population and economic resource is evident in the divergent figures each enumeration produced with little relation to each other.³⁵ From other evidence it is possible to hazard

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- 34. James Baillie Fraser, *The Himala Mountains*, London, 1820, (reprinted Delhi, 1982), pp. 113–4, 142, 202; Lieut. George Francis White, op.cit., pg. 95; Capt. Thomas Skinner, op.cit., Vol.1, pg.241. One should always be careful about these British figures since they were interested in justifying their conquest and proving that they brought peace and stability to a land and people harassed by years of war and plunder.
 - 35. The first estimates of the population of the Hill States was made right at the time of granting ‘Sanads’ to them in 1815–16, and are recorded in these documents. The discrepancy that was mentioned can be illustrated by the example of Bhajji Hill State; in the ‘Sanad’ of 1815 its population is recorded as 9,001 with an area of 96 square miles, and similarly in figures from the Begar register of 1855 it remains 9,000. In the account of Coldstream in the 1870s it is recorded as 19,000, in the 1881 Census Report it is recorded as 12,106 and then at the turn of the century in the 1901 Census figures it is recorded as 13,309. See ‘Report on the Census of the Punjab taken on the 17th of February, 1881’, by Denzil C.J. Ibbetson, of Her Majesty’s Bengal Civil Service, Vol. III, Appendix B (Final Tables for Native States), henceforth *Punjab Census, 1881, Native States; Manuscript History of the Punjab Hill States*, in W. Coldstream, Personal Papers, OIOC; Capt. D. Briggs, op.cit., Appendix B; *Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States*, 1910, Bhajji State.

The earliest dependable records of population and local resources are to be found in the Census Report of 1881 and after and it is necessary to test all previous figures with these before any generalisations are made or patterns worked out. One must also remember that the population of

that there was not much change in the population of the region apart from a gradual secular increase over the entire period of British rule.

The sex ratio, the density of population according to climatic zones and cultivable area and the structure of the working population are the classifications that one needs to be aware of for the present. It is more useful to know population density vis-à-vis the cultivated area, since human settlements in mountainous tracts have historically been scattered and the total area includes a majority of forests and 'uninhabited wastes'. The density of population to the cultivated land also gives an indication of the maximum human population that the existing technology and knowledge could sustain in an economy with a negligible market.

The sex ratio has been historically low in the entire Punjab province and this phenomenon is also found in the Western Himalayas. The earliest census enumerators noticed this and various theories were advanced as an explanation.³⁶ The most common explanation has been that female infanticide was prevalent among the 'Jut' Sikhs and among the hill Rajpoots. This explanation did not stand scrutiny of the very same people who had earlier proposed this hypothesis, as no evidence of actual killing of or severe neglect of female babies was found anywhere in the plains or the hills which was substantially different from other parts of India where this discrepancy in the sex ratio was not found. Other explanations for this have ranged from the climatic determinism of sex to the use of herbs for determining sex of the child. In short, no historically defendable proposition has been advanced for the low sex ratio in the Western Himalayas or the plains of Punjab. This low sex ratio in hill society has often been cited as the primary cause for the origin and continuation of the polyandrous family but this too suffers from similar deficiencies.³⁷ In the data provided by

the entire region did not grow at any substantial rate and the rate of growth in the late nineteenth century is generally the same as in the other decades of that century, this being the surmise drawn from a reading of the social and economic conditions of the nineteenth century.

36. Report on the Census of the Punjab, taken on the 10th January 1868, Lahore, 1870, pp. 51–5.
37. The most persuasive and well documented work with this understanding of the origin and continuation of polyandry is Y.S. Parmar, *Polyandry in the Himalayas*, Delhi, 1975.

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the census report of 1881 the sex ratio for the Hill States is 861, but if we ignore the statistics of those states which had large parts in the low river valleys and the Punjab plains, it would rise to 874.³⁸ The sex-ratio for the entire Punjab Hill States is shown in Table 1.1.³⁹

Table 1.1: Punjab hill states (sex ratio).

Year	Sex Ratio
1881	861
1901	885
1911	904
1921	902
1931	906
1941	897
1951	915
1961	923

Thus, a gradual but definite secular trend can be seen in the increase of the sex ratio in the Punjab Hill States, which is parallel to the increase in the population of the region.

There has always been a noticeable decrease in the density of population as one moves up from the plains into the higher mountains and into the areas beyond the Great Himalayan range, where it becomes one human being per square kilometre! Table 1.2 show the changes in the demographic pattern over the different climatic zones in the Western Himalayas, not only of human beings but also of cattle – an important indicator of the capability of an ecological-climatic region to sustain human life.

These figures show that while the density of population rapidly decreases from the low valleys till the trans-Himalayan lands, the density of human population to the actual cultivated land rises, but with a slight decline in the regions which fall on the southern aspect of the Great Himalayan range. This is because in this specific area the

38. Punjab Census, 1881, Native States.

39. These figures are taken from *Ibid.*; and R.L. Singh, op.cit., pg. 410.

Table 1.2: Incidence of human and cattle population (Population per square kilometre)

Topographic Region	Human		Cattle	
	Gross	Cultivated	Gross	Grazing
Fertile, flat valleys	210	487	180	748
Sub-Himalaya and Siwalik hills	80	418	120	480
Outer Himalayas	42	338	152	352
Trans-Himalayas	06	468	16	272
Spiti	01	485	0.8	2.3

(Source: Census of India, Punjab, General Reports, 1961)

relief is extremely rugged, and as might be remembered from the discussion of the relief features, most of the river valleys here are 'deep precipitous gorges' where it is very difficult to build terraces into the slopes and to harness water for irrigation. But on the whole, the figures indicate that there is still intensive cultivation of the available land, and even though, definite figures for the historical period are not available, the patterns would seem to be unchanged. In the trans-Himalayan areas there is perhaps the greatest pressure on land, since the soil is of indifferent quality and agriculture is possible only for a short four month growing season, and not for the whole year with two regular harvests like in the fertile valleys. It is also important to notice the greater intensity of cattle grazing and pastoralism in the areas below the tree line and which also, incidentally, experience the monsoon. In the Himalayas, as we keep moving up in altitude and climatic zones, it takes a larger area of land and its resources to sustain the same population and thus the structure of social relations, production patterns, political power has also to change qualitatively. This last point is crucial in understanding the emergence and development of those Hill States whose territories traversed two or more altitudinal-climatic zones.

Table 1.3 and 1.4 of the 'caste' / occupational structure of the region and of the structure of the population according to age from the 1881 Census Tables will further illuminate the specificities of the region's demography.

Table 1.3: Age Structure of Punjab hill states.

Age Group	Males	Females	Total
Under 1	07,667	07,206	14,873
1+	07,075	07,096	14,171
2+	07,966	08,263	16,229
3+	09,473	09,725	19,198
4+	10,028	09,501	19,529
5–9	51,041	46,183	97,224
10–14	45,999	34,274	80,273
15–19	36,688	32,931	69,619
20–24	33,706	31,437	65,143
25–29	35,058	32,222	67,280
30–34	38,201	34,203	72,404
35–39	24,278	18,645	42,923
40–44	20,167	26,026	46,193
45–49	14,707	10,289	24,996
50–54	22,118	16,346	38,464
55–59	07,892	04,821	12,713
60+	30,200	25,061	55,261
Total	411,354	354,289	765,643

Even in the fertile valleys it was not usually possible to meet all the demands of life from agriculture alone and thus a viable economic unit was one where agriculture was complemented by pastoralism, trade and a comprehensive sharing of labour and resources within the community. The structure of the family was one, which enabled it to participate in all these activities without neglecting any, and the input from these was pooled.⁴⁰ This pool of common resources was also not easily expandable, either through capital accumulation or extra labour,

40. Capt. Thomas Skinner, op.cit., pp. 239–40. Sir H.W. Emerson, Typescript of Unpublished Anthropological Study of Mandi and Bashahr, H.W. Emerson Personal Papers, OIOC, Chapter 1, pp. 10–12.

Table 1.4: Caste structure of population in Punjab hill states.

Caste	Population	Remarks
Kanet	2,56,971	Main agricultural caste (Khash)
Brahmin	1,00,283	Mostly agricultural (Khash)
Koli	85,227	Agricultural labour (Naga)
Chamar	41,349	Agriculture labour & menial (Naga)
Dagi	32,682	Agriculture labour & menial (Naga)
Rajput	30,776	Historical immigrants from plains
Dumna/Dom	25,916	Agriculture labour & menial (Naga)
Gujar	17,445	Migratory pastoralists (Muslim)
Bhat	13,318	Category of hill Bramhin(Khash)
Julaha	13,236	Mainly in lower hills
Lohar	11,902	Menial (some Nagas)
Gaddi	11,177	Pastoralists on Great Himalayan range
Khatri	7,788	Mainly in Mandi, Chamba, Bilaspur
Tarkhan	6,469	Menial (both Khash & Naga)
Kumhar	5,783	Menial (mainly Naga)
Thori/Turi	3,072	Menial , temple attendant (Naga)
Bohra	3,054	Immigrant trader caste
Pujari	2,454	Low priests (Naga)
Banya	2,081	Lowhills (85% Nahan & Chamba)
Chuhra	1,896	Menial

and so there was a pressing need to curtail the increase of population and the economic units operating in any given area. It was in answer to these requirements that the family in the Western Himalayas differed from its counterpart in the plains.

It is possible to use the term polyandry as a short hand reference for this family, though the most detailed anthropological work on it calls it polygynandry⁴¹ and it seems to be a variant of the group

41. D.N. Majumdar, *Himalayan Polyandry*, Bombay, 1962; the discussion on polyandry and the family's dynamic in this structure has mainly been taken from this work and from personal communication from Mohar Singh, Simla, 1993, 1995, 1996.

marriage discussed by Frederick Engels.⁴² Brothers, or others who owned land together, would together marry one woman and, if possible, other women to increase their 'pool' of wives as and when circumstances warranted. They would all be husbands and wives in common, just like their homestead, fields, community obligations, etc. One brother would take care of the seasonally migrating herds, another may take to trade or contract labour, those remaining taking charge of agriculture. There would be a similar division of labour among the wives. The children became active in the family's economy from an early age and the sons inherited the family's claims and obligations in the community jointly as a fraternal unit.

Women took charge of the household work, of agricultural work near the home, of collecting water and fuel wood and of sun drying, and otherwise preserving the agricultural produce for the winter months. Men took care of the herds of cattle and goats and sheep, of agricultural operations farther from the home of ploughing, of trade, compulsory labour and other such works. It seems the unanimous opinion of all records from the earliest British times that men did much less work than the women.⁴³

Settlement Patterns

...the natives do not prefer as sites, either the highest peaks or the greatest depths; but by choosing a situation about midway, they ensure a more temperate climate, a less rugged face, and a closer vicinity to their crops and pasturage, which are generally more flourishing and luxuriant near the glens, and towards the bases of the mountains.⁴⁴

...many of these (European houses), ..., situated on spots most remarkable for picturesque beauty, and combining the advantages of elevation and fine prospects, are often the least desirable as places of residence, on account of extreme difficulty of access to them; the steepness of the

42. Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Moscow, 1977, pp. 36, 37–42.

43. Lieut. George Francis White, op.cit., pg. 77; Capt. Thomas Skinner, op.cit., Vol. 1, pg. 279; There are various other records from the later part of the nineteenth century and the twentieth century which also give details of the sexual division of labour and the disproportionate burden on the women.

44. Lieut. George Francis White, op.cit., pg. 59.

hillsides, and the force of the rains in the months of July and August, rendering it next to impossible to keep the roads leading to them in a tolerable state of repair.⁴⁵

From the discussion of the geography of the region, it will be evident that the greatest concentration of human settlements are found in the valleys and the gentle, low slopes. Before the coming of the British there were hardly any settlements on the mountain tops and ridges which were capped by forests and/or pastures. What is not equally evident is that even in the valleys and gentle slopes there was, and still is often, a striking absence of a common village site, with the homesteads 'sprinkled' over the hill side. At the most one can say that the habitations were no more than small hamlets. Most of the 'villages' identified in the British records are 'convenient' aggregations of such neighbouring hamlets and isolated homesteads.⁴⁶ Except in areas where the river valley broadened out into a flat and expanded plain, village clusters of many homesteads were rarely to be found in the Western Himalayas. In the census report of 1881 the enumerators identified a total of 12,913 distinct settlements in the Punjab Hill States, of which 12,112 had a population of less than 200 people with the report remarking that many of these settlements were actually much smaller. Only 758 settlements had a population of 200 to 500 people and 36 had a population between 500 to 1,000. In the entire region only 7 settlements had a population of over 1,000 of which four were classified as towns. The number of villages per 100 square miles varied from 11 in Chamba, 25 in Bashahr, 46 in Suket to 2,143 in Kuthar, 722 in Keonthal and 823 in Dhami.⁴⁷ A pattern can be discerned here that the bigger states have a remarkably low density of settlements

45. *Ibid.* pg. 123.

46. In the hills cultivation is necessarily scattered, and this prevents the formation of large villages. The people live in isolated hamlets near their fields. The administrative unit is always a group of such hamlets. In Bashahr the group is called a *ghori*, and in the smaller States a *pargana*... . In upper Kanawar, where the people do not depend entirely on cultivation of the soil for their livelihood, some of the hamlets are comparatively large. *Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States*, 1910, op.cit. Bashahr state, pp.42-3.

47. Punjab Census, 1881, Native States.

whereas the smaller states have considerably higher densities, a trend which is discussed in greater length in the next chapter.

A modern book of geography classifies the rural settlements of the region into three types that fits the pattern which is found in the records of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These three types are, (i) semi-sprinkled, fragmented or hamleted type, (ii) sprinkled or dispersed type, (iii) isolated homesteads.⁴⁸ Intensive cultivation of land and also use of its non-agricultural resources, collective management of water and a common agricultural routine are identified as the basis for the first type listed here. Where the relief has dissected the land into small patches and agricultural land is scattered over a large area of the slope and valley, normally the second type listed above is found. In the higher mountains where cultivable land and grazing lots at any one place cannot sustain more than a few people is found the last type of settlements. In the trans-Himalayan arid climatic zone, settlements are far from each other and houses are densely packed at places where agriculture is possible in conjunction with other economic activities. The first two types are found in the lower hills and the valleys, whereas the second and third types are found in the areas above 2,000 metres.

The decision to situate the homestead or village is based on the following considerations.⁴⁹ The location should not be exposed to high winds, should not have landslips in the mountain slope overlooking the homesteads or agricultural land, should not be too far from a source of water which can be harnessed for irrigation, and should have land which can be terraced into cultivable strips. Routes of communication and major religious centres also became sites for habitation. While the houses are in the valleys, they are not usually located deep at the base of the valley. The land right at the bottom is used for agriculture and it also gets relatively little sun. The homesteads are usually situated on a spur or slope, a few hundred feet above the valley bed, where the land can be levelled for constructing houses. The houses of the menial groups are rarely together with those of the upper 'castes' and are situated on land

48. R.L. Singh, op.cit., pg.412.

49. *Ibid.*; Personal communication of Mohar Singh, Simla, 1996; Personal communication of Deep Chand Tomar, Shillai, 1996.

which is inferior in one or the other parameters, by which house plots are selected.⁵⁰ The situation of the houses of the main agricultural and proprietary groups on a slight elevation above the main fields provides the best location to keep a check on the crops and is also safe from floods.

The coming of the British completely changed the pattern of settlements because all their habitations were on the hill tops and ridges where the local hill peasant had little interest apart from temples on some hill tops and grazing. The British settlements, per se, did not disturb the pattern of the local population due to their physical separation and because of their lack of interest in the region's resources (till, of course, they found the forests as an unending source of high quality timber). There was no traumatic colonial encounter in the Western Himalayas as in so many other regions, where expanding industrial capital came into contact with societies whose economies did not even have any money or marketable surplus, and were not competent to relate to this constellation of new forces on an equal footing.

Agriculture

Agriculture has historically been the most important component of the hill economy even though it has rarely been large enough in area, or productive enough in yield, to single handedly sustain populations dependant on it. Only when there has been a combination of this with pastoralism, labour and trade, that there has been a minimal level of self-sufficiency in the hill economy.

The holdings are generally small and very subdivided, the fields of a single cultivator being scattered at different levels on the slopes around the village site.... The ordinary peasant is not entirely dependent on his crops. He usually has a few cows, and a flock of sheep and goats. In the higher villages, the well to do own large flocks which are driven to the alpine pastures in the spring. Labour in the forest supplies a subsidiary means of livelihood.⁵¹

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50. Mohar Singh, *Ibid.*; R.H.W. Dunlop, *Hunting in the Himalayas*, London, 1860, pg. 183.
 51. Sir H.W. Emerson, op.cit., chapter 1, pg. 12. The higher villages referred to here are not the trans-Himalayan ones but those in the upper reaches of the river valleys south and east of the Great Himalayan range.

The importance of agriculture has been that it has provided an anchor to the people in relation to these other activities, all of which entailed continual movement, and thus enabled the development of settled life. In the low valleys and flat lands, the winter being mild and there being fertile depositional soil, it was possible to produce two harvests every year and also irrigate a larger proportion of the land.⁵² Here were located relatively large tracts of cultivated land which also had a higher yield and grew a greater diversity of crops, specially vegetables. In valleys along small hill torrents and streams, where little flat land was available, the low spurs and patches along the stream were intensively terraced into cultivable strips where water was made available through diversionary irrigation works.⁵³

In the mountainous areas south and west of the Great Himalayan range, the proportion of cultivated land to the total area has always been very small, and remained in the range of 6% to 12% from the time of the coming of the British till the mid sixties.⁵⁴ This stagnation in the arable area has primarily been due to the immense difficulty of creating and maintaining terraces on the face of the hill slopes without which even the most rudimentary agriculture is impossible. In 1971 only 6.4% of the land in Simla district was arable while in Kullu district it was higher at 12%. Of the land under cultivation an equally small percentage is under irrigation in the mountainous region, though in the low lands this amount is higher.⁵⁵ In the Simla area less than 10% of the cultivated land is irrigated even today. But in the trans-Himalayan areas almost all the land that is cultivated is irrigated, since these areas are a climatic extension of the 'dry desert' of Tibet and no agriculture is possible merely on precipitation.

The crops grown in the Western Himalayas at the time of the British conquest were wheat and barley, some variety of oats, poppy, oilseeds and inferior grains native to the region which the British did not recognise as any that were grown in Europe or other parts of

52. *Simla Hill States Gazetteer*, op.cit., Bashahr state, pg. 47; R.L. Singh, op.cit., pg. 421.

53. Lieut. George Francis White, op.cit., pg. 55.

54. R.L. Singh, *Ibid*.

55. *Ibid*; *Simla Hill States Gazetteer*, op.cit., Various states.

India.⁵⁶ All these were the Rabi or winter crops. These were, and still are, sown after the monsoons are over, the exact time differing from early September to late October depending on the specific climate of the location and harvested in early summer. The main Kharif crop has always been rice, and water was collected in the terraced plots for its cultivation. Many 'inferior' crops were also grown at this time in the unirrigated land, the only cash crops being tobacco and bhang, which were sent to the plains and to Tibet.⁵⁷ But this was not very common and most of the references to their cultivation and trade is from the low hills of Sirmaur.

Pastoralism

Pastoralism was central to the sustenance of not only the Hill State but also the individual polyandrous peasant family and was instrumental in making the resources of the forests and pastures readily available to them in forms which could be appropriated both for consumption and as surplus by the State.⁵⁸ As is evident from Table 1.5, cultivable land was a small percentage of the total land available. These figures are from the Census Report of 1961, when the entire region had faced the brunt of commercial forestry for a century, and large tracts of land had been made potentially available for cultivation due to (i) the clearing of forests, (ii) the encouragement of the independent Indian State for extending cultivation, and (iii) the economic pull of commercial horticulture. It will be noticed that given these changed circumstances since the time of the early nineteenth century, cultivable land is still not more than 30% of the total area in any mountainous tract. Even in the flat valleys with their fertile depositional soil, almost half the land is outside the ambit of

56. Mrs. W.L.L. Scott, op.cit.; James Baillie Fraser, op.cit., pp. 116–118; Lieut. George Francis White, op.cit., pg.57; Capt. Thomas Skinner, op.cit., Vol.1, pp. 252, 283.

57. James Baillie Fraser, op.cit., pg. 118; Rampoor Fair, Records of the Financial Commission of India, 1868, OIOC, pg.62.

58. Thus it often happens that out of four brothers, one is engaged in agriculture, at least one tends the flocks, while a third was previously required to give service to the State for six months in a year. Sir H.W. Emerson, op.cit., chapter III, pg. 29.

Table 1.5: Land use in beas and Sutlej basin⁵⁹ (as percentage of total area in the region)

Region	Forest	Cultivated	Hay	Graze	Misc.	Area above 3900
Spiti/Trans-Himalayas	20	02	28	00	10	40
Greater Himalayas	37	16	09	33	5	00
Lower Him./Shiwaliks	15	30	20	25	10	00
Lower/Flat Valleys	13	14	16	18	10	00

agriculture. The resources of this land could only be appropriated through pastoralism in the given technology that was available. With the economic importance of timber to the British, there developed a potential for a clash over the use of the forests but that vexed historical question addressed in another chapter.

Grass and forest undergrowth was available at all climatic zones at various times of the year. To maximise the use of the forests and pastures for their herds of cattle and sheep and goats, the Himalayan peasant had to continually move them from one climatic zone to another according to the seasons. The broad pattern would be that during winter the herds would be moved into the foothills and valleys, while during summer these would be taken up into the high mountains and meadows when the snow had melted there.⁶⁰ When the herds would move up and down the mountains they would pass the villages on their way and would manure the cultivable land with their droppings. These herds had to stay away for months at a time from the village and thus, specific people had to be given responsibility for them, usually younger brothers or grown up sons.

There were two forms of the pastoral movement, one, of the local village herds which travelled only within the valley and did not go too far from the village or homestead. The other pastoral movement was of the nomadic pastoralists, the Gaddis and the Gujars, who travelled large distances from the Shiwalik foothills to the trans-

59. K.L. Joshi, op.cit., pg. 57.

60. Sir H.W. Emerson, op.cit., pp. 28–9.

Himalayan border and sometimes beyond.⁶¹ The Gaddis mainly travelled in the trans-Himalayan regions in summer and in the middle Himalayas of Chamba State during winter. The Gujar's movements were in the lower and middle Himalayas and spread over from Kashmir to Garhwal. These two nomadic pastoral groups were of greater importance to the State than to the villagers, though their herds provided vital manure to the villagers' fields and for which they often received payments in kind. The State had interest in them since they paid tax in both cash and kind.⁶² Large tracts of the Hill States' territory which were lying waste without any possibility of agriculture were converted into an economic asset due to pastoralism, but it always remained a poor comparison to agriculture, specially in terms of money.

Communication

The barriers to normal communication between people living in the different areas of the Western Himalayas due to the high mountains and dense forests has already been mentioned. Here, the ways that were developed to circumvent these barriers and the directions and patterns of communications that emerged over time in this region will be studied. The major driver of communication was trade and it also provided the impetus for overcoming the barriers to communication.

River valleys provided the most natural gaps in the wall of mountains to the traveller and they were all used as gateways between the different areas of the region. These rivers flowed from the highest mountain range to the plains dissecting the lower ranges. Most of the human settlements were also in these valleys and thus it made eminent sense for travellers to follow these valleys. They would not

61. *Gazetteer of the Kangra District, Part III Lahul, 1897*, (reprint New Delhi, 1994), pp. 47–8; and *Gazetteer of the Sirmur State, 1934*, (reprinted New Delhi, 1996), pg. 78.

62. G.C. Barnes, op.cit., Appendix A 'Account of the Rampoor State, from beginning of Katick, 1916 Sumbut, to the end of Assouj 1917 Sumbut—twelve months.' While the cash income from grazing and pasturage was minimal, there was a relatively large and constant flow of sheep, goats and cattle products which necessitated the separate book keeping for these even after the financial reforms of Barnes, *Ibid.*, pp.110–3.

only find easy access through the ranges but would also not be stranded without supplies.⁶³ This was the usual route of travel in the Himalayas. The problem arose when travel had to be across the Great Himalayan range, which was not dissected by any river other than the Sutlej. The valley of this river became the most important route for traversing the Great Himalayan range, but the entire trade and communication with the trans-Himalayan region and Tibet could not be sustained by one single valley.⁶⁴ At other places travellers had to find the low points of the mountain chains that came to be called 'passes' and became important junctions of routes on either side of the Great Himalayan range.⁶⁵ Settlements which catered to these passes became important *entreports* for the Himalayan trade and developed into towns states which controlled these towns and passes became large and powerful entities.⁶⁶

These river valleys, by cutting through the main mountain chains of the region, made possible the collaboration of people living in different climatic zones with each other and thus utilise their natural resources commonly. By providing flat lands along its banks and water for irrigation, and by providing routes for communication, the

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- 63. Many references to the importance of confining travel routes to the valleys and through villages are to be found in the travelogues. See, Capt. Thomas Skinner, op.cit.; and Mrs. J.C. Murray-Aynsley, *An Account of a Three Months Tour From Simla through Bussahir, Kunowar and Spiti, to Lahoul*, Calcutta, 1882, for interesting descriptions of the problems of supplies, coolies and mules for the nineteenth century traveller.
 - 64. *Rampoor Fair*, Records of the Financial Commission, Government of India, No. 14, 1868, pp. 60–4, OIOC; G.C. Barnes, op.cit., pg. 108.
 - 65. Walter Hamilton, *A Geographical, Statistical, and Historical Description of Hindostan and the Adjacent Countries*, London, 1820, (reprint, Delhi, 1971), pp. 603–6; Capt. D. Briggs, op.cit., pp. 5–8, 11.
 - 66. The towns of Mandi and Rampur are the important trading centres of the region we are studying and they concentrated all the trade of the region between the river Ravi and the Ganga. Mandi, with its easy access to the plains of Punjab on the one side and to both the Rohtang Pass and the Sutlej valley on the other, became the focus of this trade. The exact processes by which these states used the trade network to integrate large tracts of agricultural and pastoral lands into a stable state system is an historical process which is still obscure but to any observer of the nineteenth century their importance to the social and economic life of the entire region cannot be lost.

rivers of the Western Himalayas have provided the two central components of hill life. At certain points travel routes had to cross the rivers either due to topographical reasons or to access certain settlements. The methods used to enable river crossings were the rope bridge, wooden bridge, and inflated goatskins. These wooden bridges were either single long pine trunks thrown across the water channel or sometimes elaborate structures which needed some skill to make and were composed of many tree trunks sawn and fit together.⁶⁷

In the areas south of the Great Himalayan range, where the monsoon was active, the rivers often flooded and thus travel had to be timed in accordance with the seasons. Beyond the Great Himalayan range it was only during summer (about the same months that the monsoon was active on the other side of the range) that travel was feasible, since these were the precise months when there was least snow and the 'passes' were accessible. Travellers also needed tracks for most routes where ponies and mules could move, since all the loads not carried by the animals had to be carried by humans. Many river valleys which were difficult for mules or ponies to access never became important as travel routes.

High mountains (the transverse ridges) divided the river valleys and communication between them was almost as difficult as travel across the main mountain chains.⁶⁸ These valleys, it should also be

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- 67. Lieut. George Francis White, op.cit., provides detailed descriptions of the manner of crossing the rivers of the Himalayas. Plate XII, between pages 62–3, has a sketch of an elaborately built wooden bridge and Plate XXI, between pages 98–9, has a sketch of a rope bridge along with their respective descriptions. Page 101 has a long description of the manner of crossing the Sutlej on inflated goatskins.
 - 68. Capt. Thomas Skinner, op.cit., devotes many pages recounting the difficulties in accessing the valley of the Ganga directly from the valley of the Yamuna. He had to finally come down to the plains and then climb up the Ganga valley and could not find a direct route inspite of all his labours. Even today in the era of motorised travel it is much easier to travel up and down the river valley than cross the watershed into the neighbouring valley. To travel from Rampur Bashahr in the Sutlej valley to Kullu in the Beas valley, one has to come down to Bilaspur in the Siwaliks before ascending up to Kullu. The route across the watershed is across the Jalori Pass which remains closed from the end of October till May.

remembered, were the basins of the respective rivers and they flowed into the plains at different points and also had their origin at different points in the mountains. Thus, travel routes specific to each river valley developed over time and each such route had its specific pass at the point where it met the Great Himalayan range. There was a similar but distinct rhythm, which developed in all these routes, and they became the arteries of trade between the plains and the trans-Himalayan regions of Tibet, Zanskar, Ladakh, and on till they met with the famed Silk Route.

Sub-Regions of the Western Himalayas

It may be useful to end this chapter with a discussion of the manner in which one may attempt a division of the Western Himalayas into sub-regions, which would provide the location for any study of its historical processes. To do such an exercise one has to consider first the interrelated aspects of physical geography, relief and drainage, and climate and natural vegetation. One way of dividing the regions into its sub-regions is to focus on the climate and the topography. Each of the parallel mountain ranges would form its own zone of distinct climate and ecology. The Shiwaliks have a sub-tropical climate; the Middle Himalayas have a temperate and alpine climate and the regions beyond the Great Himalayan range have the climate commonly called the ‘cold desert’. These climatic-ecological zones define the entire Himalayas, though they might be interspersed with local climatic features due to relief and the ‘micro-climate’. When one attempts a historical analysis of the region, one has to keep the climatic variations and its social, cultural consequences always in focus.

There is another means of dividing the entire region into its constitutive sub-regions and that is by focusing on the river valley. Historically, human settlements have developed in each river valley in relative isolation from their parallel valleys as discussed earlier. The social, economic and political continuity that one finds in each such river valley makes them distinct regions in themselves. It was only a successful combination of all the resources available from the various climatic zones in each river valley that enabled the formation of stable village communities and of territorial Hill States. It is therefore of greater historical importance for us to identify the distinct regions of

the river valleys of the Western Himalayas and focus our study on these. This will enable the proper study of the various processes of transformation without losing out on its complexity.

If the study is confined to lower hills, there is a risk of losing out the influence of Tibet on the regions culture and trade. If the study is confined to the higher hills the influences of the plains of Hindustan is lost. It is also not possible to confine the study to some isolated area of the middle Himalayas since that would not enable any sustainable historical generalisation. The valley of the Sutlej has been one of the most important historical regions and also does not have unusual features as found in the valleys of the Yamuna and Ganga where religious pilgrims had brought strong influences of orthodox Hinduism and cash to the region from medieval times. This will be confined study to this valley though it would be useful to refer to material from neighbouring valleys for comparison.

CHAPTER TWO

Political Economy of the Western Himalayas in the Early Nineteenth Century

This chapter is divided into two parts, the sphere of production and the sphere of politics, which could also be called the processes and institutions of appropriation. It begins by an attempt at quantifying the productive percentage of the population of the Western Himalayas, in reference to the specificity of their village communities. This would enable a better understanding of the nature of production, the social context of appropriation and the working of political processes, which were strongly conditioned by the unique constraints that were imposed by a combination of geography, discussed in the last chapter, and demography. The discussion on production first deals with the forms of labour in the various productive processes and moves on to study separately these different productive processes – agriculture, pastoralism, artisan manufacture and trade. The discussion on the sphere of politics focuses on the two main methods of surplus appropriation employed – Begar labour and rent-in-kind, as well as the constraints on accumulation that can be identified. The two main centres of power, the lineage based clans and the Hill State and their inter relations with each other will subsequently be studied.

It will be one of the contentions of this book that the interdependence of production, the demographic and geographic constraints on either the intensification or expansion of production and the exceptional marginality, both economic and spatial, of monetisation, even among the trading groups, holds the key to

understanding the uniqueness of the Western Himalayan political economy before the intrusion of the British.

The Sphere of Production

This section begins by looking at one aspect of the production process of the region under study, namely, the proportion of people involved in productive labour within the limits of the economic universe. This would highlight the obstacles to expanding the social surplus and the reasons why the parallel but autonomous institutions of surplus appropriators could not unify into a single hierarchy of political power. This, in its turn, would help gain a better understanding of the nature and composition of the social surplus produced, and to understand the historically specific nature of labour demands in this region.

Forms of Labour

It would be an attempt to include in the study here, those aspects of labour that usually do not get accounted for in economic analysis, like domestic labour, child nurturing, and other minor activities which cannot easily be statistically substantiated. While these have generally not been considered work, due to the patriarchal bias of scholars working from within bourgeois contexts, it was also ignored in many pre-modern societies because domestic labour and its products were not part of the revenue demand of the State on its subjects. But an analysis of the total labour time spent by a family on activities which were not part of the revenue calculation of the mediaeval State, shows that these were crucial to the survival of the peasant family often contributing a major share of their diet, and were thus crucial to the reproduction of labour.

There is another methodological reason for including domestic labour in our calculations of the peasant economy. Women, who had to bear the responsibility for total domestic labour, also did a large part of the agricultural work in the Himalayas. Women took part in all the different operations connected with agriculture like sowing, weeding, harvesting and also at places, ploughing, specially where it was done by a hoe or they pulled the plough, where topographical conditions made the use of cattle difficult for ploughing on narrow

terraces and steep hill sides¹. Children were used mainly as additional labour during periods of intensive labour such as sowing and harvesting and for various supplementary activities. The direction of surplus appropriation was not only class specific but, equally, gender specific.

By relating the percentage of the total labour force to the usual size of the community one shall be able to get an idea of the number of people who had to be fed and looked after from the total produce of the community's labour. Only after the consumption by this non-productive percentage of the community is deducted from the total social product, can an idea of the approximate size of the surplus that was available for appropriation be gauged. As chapter 4 details, whenever there was an attempt made to increase the demands on the peasantry, they revolted. This point is further important to an understanding of the peasant rebellions, *Dumhs*, during British times since the new revenue system imposed new burdens which the existent social structure was not able to handle.

There is no record of the enumeration or other estimation of the population of the Western Himalayas before the advent of the British. The first census statistics that include dependable data on various economic and social features is the 1881 census, more than sixty-five years after the conquest of this region. These cannot provide us with the actual figures of the first decade of the nineteenth century, but they do indicate the broad patterns of sex and age ratios, the proportion of the population in various productive activities and such other general features. From these it is possible to make tentative hypotheses, which can be sustained only on the basis of evidence from other sources, and by their ability to explain features of this social and political world which have not been adequately explained by existing research. Even so, the authority of these hypotheses would not be of the same order as those deduced from contemporary evidence. It must

1. George Francis White, *Views in India: chiefly among the Himalaya Mountains*, London and Paris, 1836, pp. 56, 77; J.B. Fraser, *The Himala Mountains*, 1820, reprinted Delhi, 1982, pg. 115; The *Simla District Gazetteer, 1888–89*, reprinted Delhi, 1992, pg. 38–, 'Women perform all kinds of agricultural labour except sowing and ploughing, much of the field work being done by them; while they may even be seen yoked in the plough in the place of oxen.'

also be kept in mind that these figures are for the Punjab Hill States and thus excluded important areas like the Kullu valley which were under direct British administration and might have made these statistics more useful. The relative inaccuracy of these figures also arises because they cover the entire region and thus generalise over climatic and topographical distinctions, whose importance has been studied in the last chapter. Nonetheless, one gets important indications about the nature of hill society from them because as seen in the last chapter, there were long lasting social and economic patterns like the percentage of arable land, sex ratio, etc.

Table 1.3 shows that 1,81,224 people are enumerated below the age of 9, which accounts for 23.67% of the total population. To this one could add 67,974 people who are above 55 years of age or 8.88% of the population. A majority of them were outside the regular production process though this would depend on the occupational and lineage group to which they belonged. This would mean that close to a third of the population was outside the production processes, and therefore their requirements had to be met from the labour of the rest of the population. Most children became active contributors to the family economy from around the early teens. Therefore, it would not be proper to include them in the proportion of those who were dependent on others for their survival. But if one adds the 10–14 age group to those who are economically dependent, the percentage comes to 43. This gives an indication of the burden on the productive population and the immediate subsistence requirements it had to fulfil. While at first glance this percentage of the productive population would appear similar to many other regions outside the Western Himalayas, one must counter pose this figure with the fact that only 11% of the total land available was cultivable.

But these figures also reveal some other equally interesting features of the social composition of the labour force. That 23.67% of the population was under the age of 9, also indicates that birth and child mortality rates were very high. Though one knows from various sources that women continued working in the family economy till late into their pregnancy², it is obvious that this high birth rate, with its

2. Interview with the family of former 'Lambardars' of Shillai, District Sirmaur, June 1996; Interview with villagers in Gadadi, District Sirmaur, June, 1996.

concomitant effect on health and the demands of basic infant nurturing, reduced their capacity to labour. While this is not computable, both due to lack of economic tools and silences in our sources, it is important to keep this aspect in mind when understanding the nature and potential of the available labour in these mountain economies, which obviously got reduced because of this. One must also remember that the sex ratio was pretty low at this period. For the population between 10–55, the main labour force, the sex ratio was 872. The social structuring of agricultural work was such that it was heavily dependent on the labour of women and servile agricultural labourers.

Table 1.4 shows the relative population of the various social groups in the region of the study. One finds that Kolis, who were mainly agricultural labourers, were 11.13% of the total population. At other places the settlements and gazetteers of the different Hill States have put them variously at 1/4, 1/5, 1/7 of their total population³. The 1911 census says that tenants (this was the term used interchangeably with Koli, Bethu, agricultural labourer, and later, tenant-at-will in different British records) account for 17.1 % of the population of the Punjab Hills.⁴ These groups laboured on the cultivation of the landed peasantry and the non-peasant landholders. Much of the labour during heavy agricultural operations, other than ploughing, was provided by non-family labour of which this formed an important part.

It is not possible to understand the limits that were imposed on productive forces unless one transports the percentages discussed above to the self-sufficient and localised economic community. This community can be defined as the limits of, first, the networks of reciprocal and servile labour and second, the natural resource base on which this economy was dependent. These were almost always the same as the limits of the clan community or *Bhaichara*, but perhaps this definitional distinction should be maintained to keep the economic

3. *Simla District Gazetteer, 1888–89*, reprinted Delhi, 1992 puts their population at approximately 26% of the population of the district which was primarily urban and thus returned a higher proportion of these menial castes than in any other neighbouring tract which are covered in the *Simla Hill States Gazetteer, 1910*, reprinted New Delhi, 1995.

4. *Census of India, 1911*, Vol. XV, Punjab, Part I, pg. 469.

and social issues from getting mixed up. The usual range of size of a village was between 200 to 1000 individuals and each economic and social community consisted of not more than five or six such villages.⁵ By focusing on the average variation of the size of the Himalayan mountain community, one shall perhaps find it easier to understand the implications of the age and sex ratios of the region. One must remember that most of these communities were economically self-sustaining and their contact with populations in the neighbouring valleys was sporadic.

If one looks at a community of about 1000 individuals one finds that not more than 600 of them are economically active; including pregnant and nurturing mothers, according to the percentages worked out above. In a region where the yield from agriculture was, and continues to be, much lower than the plains, this meant a physical burden of a very high order. Agricultural yields were low in relation not only to the seed sown,⁶ they were low also in relation to the area of cultivable land because much of the land could not be used in winter, and even the best land often had to be left fallow for its fertility to replenish. Agricultural work also involved the extra labour of building and maintaining terraces into the gradient and of cutting irrigation water channels from the streams to the fields, often a

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5. There is no proper data on the size and composition of the Himalayan villages in the official documents and the revenue villages demarcated in the land settlements do not necessarily follow the existing social patterns but were formed keeping in mind the requirements and conveniences of revenue administration. There are frequent references to the structure of Himalayan habitation sites in the travelogues and other accounts of the early nineteenth century. The habitation clusters ranged from twenty to fifty houses or 'families', with some bigger centres consisting of anything between a hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty houses. J.B. Fraser, op.cit.; Capt. Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India, Including a Walk Over the Himalaya Mountains*, 2Vols, London, 1832, pp.231–233, 241,254; also interview with the family of former 'Lambardars' of Shillai, District Sirmaur, June 1996.
 6. For example see *Kullu*, 1897, pp.88–89, where the reported 'experimental' yield of irrigated rice is shown to be 700 Pakka Seers where as the reported yield for Waziris Rupi and Saraj is 420 and 400 Pakka Seers, respectively.

distance of many miles.⁷ The scattered nature of the land under the control of one single family meant that much extra labour was spent on accessing the fields under cultivation, specially when the journey had to be made with tools or other heavy materials. The care of pastoral herds was given to adolescent children or the aged and their absence from the homestead put a drain on the labour available for agricultural and domestic work.⁸ There were also the Begar demands of the Hill State and the village deity which had to be fulfilled. The normal demand for Begar was usually equal to six months labour of one male individual per family to the Hill State, and there were other equally exacting obligations to the clan deity which were given ‘voluntarily’. Apart from this, the Hill State could make extra demands on special occasions. These diversions from food producing and gathering activities meant that the percentage of a village’s population left for productive activities was not more than half the total and very often less than that.

This particular form of demographic constraint, specific to the unusual geography of the Himalayas, had some major historical consequences. The first was social stratification was that much more difficult to emerge, because of the constant need for socialising labour in a context of the smallness of available surplus. The second was that a very large part of the surplus that was appropriated was in the form of direct labour which could not be accumulated, specially in the given technological milieu. The third consequence was that a major portion of the storable goods of a possible surplus, like food grains, wool,

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7. Fraser, op. cit., pp. 63, 112: ‘... it will perhaps excite wonder that corn tillage should have been attempted at all in a land that appears only calculated, at best, for grazing’; *Bashahr*, 1910, pg. 49; *Kullu*, 1897, pg.81: ‘The canal cut which supplies the water for irrigation is often brought from a long distance, and having its head high up the valley of the torrent which feeds it has sometimes to be conducted by means of wooden aqueducts round cliffs and across streams. If it falls out of order the work of many hands is required to put it in repair, and there is an organised system of long standing for collecting labour’, J.B. Lyall, *Final Settlement Report of Kangra District*, 1872, (henceforth Lyall) pg.141.
 8. H.W. Emerson, *Typescript of Unpublished Anthropological Study of Mandi and Bashahr*, MSS. EUR. No. 0321, Oriental and India Office Collection of the British Library, Chapter VI, pp. 39–40, and Chapter III, pg. 29.

artisan manufacture, etcetera were used up for the survival of the non productive members of the community. One finds here a possible clue to explain stagnation within the social formation, though it is not possible to comment further on this at the present stage of research on pre-British Western Himalayas.

It is in this evident shortage of labour that one can, perhaps, find clues for the existence and resilience of institutions like reciprocal community labour and the ubiquitous group marriage or 'polyandry', which were presupposed on a relatively non-hierarchical social organisation. The basic function of these institutions was to provide social labour for individual purposes indicating a very low level of division of labour in the economy. This tradition of providing social labour for individual purposes was used for developing forms of appropriation of social labour by institutions like the Hill State and the deity. It was not possible for individuals within the clan community to inherit the control of this social labour, which undermined any possibility for the emergence of strong class based social formations and mature State structures.

Productive activities in the region under study were dependent on two forms of labour. There was labour, which had control over its product, and there was labour, which had to alienate its product to those who controlled it. The labour of agricultural labourers like the Kolis, women and children was of the latter type, while the labour of the brothers of a polyandrous family was of the former type. It is not possible to calculate the amount of labour under each of these categories though it seems that a large share was of the labour which did not control its product. While it is important to recognise the distinct contribution of the labour of women and children, as well as its lack of political control over its product, it would be incorrect to equate these with the labour of Koli agricultural labourers, who were outside the family.

Within the peasant family there was both the labour which controlled its product and was expended on land and other natural resources under its possession, and labour which was given to the clan deity and the Hill State as Begar, over which the peasant family had no control. The dominant form of labour, within the peasant family, was on land and other resources it controlled and

inherited.⁹ This labour was not confined to the individual peasant family, but was essentially social in nature since successful cultivation, pastoralism, foraging from forests and other productive activities depended on reciprocal labour contributions from other peasant families. As one shall see later in this chapter, this social nature of labour was expressed also in the manner of fixing the revenue demand of the Hill State on the peasant community as a unit and not on individual families.

It was during harvesting, and sometimes sowing irrigated crops like rice, that labour in excess of that available in the family was required and at these times the labour of other peasant families was requisitioned.¹⁰ All the other members of the clan provided this labour to the needy family not only during specific agricultural operations but also during other occasions like the building of a house or the construction of a water channel.¹¹ This form of labour has popularly been seen as a form of communal labour and of social organisation prevalent in the Himalayas. It is important to note, this form of labour was a demand based on reciprocity and presupposed a political community, where labour was not only social in its nature but was also seen to be so by the people. There was no payment for this labour

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9. The Hill State demanded six months of one male member's labour per family and there were similar fixed amounts of labour that had to be given for the clan and other reigning deities which was variable from temple to temple. It is not possible to compute the exact amount of labour that was taken from an average peasant family since on different occasions labour of varying amounts and intensities was demanded by both these institutions. See the discussion under the sub-heading 'Appropriation of Labour' later in the chapter.
 10. Fraser, op.cit., pg. 218, 'Each individual has his own field or division of land, which he tills by his own labour and that of his family; but in those operations which require speed or assistance, he is aided by other villagers, to whom in their turn he gives his labour when required'; *Kullu, 1897*, pg. 82: 'Each proprietor has his appointed day or days for receiving water for his rice-planting, and when his turn comes all the people of the village or *phati*, men, women and children, turn out to help him, and are fed at his expense'. Reciprocal labour is a common feature of agricultural societies in many parts of the Indian sub-continent, specially where lineage structures define the political communities.
 11. *Kullu, 1897*, pg. 81.

though the 'host' family had to provide the mid-day meal for the participants.¹² This labour could only be requisitioned from other members of the *bhaichara*, a term which would literally mean 'brotherhood', but is best translated as a partilineal group or clan.¹³

Agricultural operations were also dependent on another type of non-family labour, which was not reciprocal but was provided by ritually subordinate agricultural labourers. They were known as Kolis, Doms, Dagis and by other occupation specific names in different parts of the Western Himalayas.¹⁴ The labour they provided was known as Beth and they were also known as Bethus¹⁵. This agricultural labour was of three different forms, that which was given to the peasant landholders,¹⁶ that which was provided to individual families who had cultivable fields which could not normally be cultivated only by family labour, either due to the extent of the holdings or due to some ritual bar regarding agricultural activities on the family members,¹⁷ and that given to the royal family on its agricultural holdings which were called *Bassa*. The labour appropriated by the entire community of peasants or the *bhaichara* was according to the specific needs of the

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12. *Kullu*, 1897, pg. 82; *Bashahr*, 1910, pg. 50: 'The system called *bowara* is employed when extra field labour is required, as for instance at harvest. The first *zamindar*, whose crop ripens, calls in all his neighbours, both Kanets and Kolis, to help him, and gives them their food during the time they are employed. When the crop is reaped the whole party goes to some one else's field, and so on, until everyone has been assisted by every one else'.
 13. There are detailed descriptions of the nature and structure of the *bhaichara* and its relation to the agriculture, and more broadly, to the control of resources in most Land Settlement Reports and in many Gazetteers not only of the Punjab Hill region but also of the Himalayan regions of the United Provinces.
 14. *Bashahr*, 1910, pg. 22; *Simla*, 1888–89, pg. 42; *Kullu*, 1897, pg. 60; G.D. Berreman, *Hindus of the Himalayas*, Delhi, 1997, pg. 200; D. N. Majumdar, *Himalayan Polyandry*, Bombay, 1962, pp. 61–63, 68.
 15. Punjab Hill State Agency (henceforth PHSA), *Begar in the Simla Hill States*, 1939, Bundle No. 19, Serial No. 489, pg. 64; H.W. Emerson, op.cit., Chapter III, pp. 13–15.
 16. *Bashahr*, 1910, pg. 50; Interview with the family of former 'Lambardars' of Shillai, District Sirmaur, June, 1996.
 17. H.W. Emerson, ibid.

individual peasant family. No single family owned the labourer or his labour but they were ritually tied to the *bhaichara* through religious and mythological bonds.

The Bethus could not lay claim to any land, they themselves were hereditarily attached to their masters who could transfer this bondage to others. This transfer of the Bethus was most common when they were given as part of the dowry of some ruler or as donation to priests or other revenue free landholders, with or without the land they cultivated.¹⁸ Payment for Beth was given through *Chhak* and a share in the harvest. *Chhak* consisted of food of about two *seers* of bread daily and two suits of clothing annually. The share of the harvest has been recorded in the British Land Settlements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the range of 1/12 to 1/10 of the crop.¹⁹ Often one also finds evidence of some marginal land of low productivity being given to the Bethus for their subsistence instead of this share of the harvest.

These records certainly show the importance of this form of labour to the agricultural economy even in areas where the local chiefs had been dislodged by direct British administration for many decades. In the Simla District Gazetteer, 1888–9, (as distinct from the Simla Hill States which were formally under the local rulers), one finds that about a fifth of the land was being cultivated by the Bethus who formed 23.5% of the population of the rural areas of Kotgarh and Kotkhai²⁰. Comparatively, in the state of Bushahr the free peasantry held much less land, only 57% of the cultivated land in Rampur pargana,²¹ and the importance of Beth labour, which was used to cultivate the *Bassa*, *Jagir* and *Muafi* lands, was much more.

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- 18. Punjab Hill States Agency, *Begar in the Simla Hill States, 1944*, Bundle 17, No. 451, ‘Policy Regarding Beth in Simla Hill States/Estates’, pp. 24–25; also Mohan Singh Rathore, *Nineteenth Century Cis-Sutlej Hill States*, H.P. University, Simla, 1987, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis), pp. 255–7; Jai Deep Negi, *Begar and Beth System in Himachal Pradesh*, Delhi, 1995, pp. 5–6.
 - 19. PHSA, *Begar in the Simla Hill States, 1939*, Bundle 19, No. 489, pg. 146; *Begar in Punjab Hill States, 1944*, Bundle 17, No. 451, pg. 160; *Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States, [Baghal State], 1934*, Lahore, 1935, Chapter 2B; *Simla District Gazetteer, 1904*, Lahore, 1908, pg. 58.
 - 20. *Census of India, 1911*, op.cit., pg. 496.
 - 21. *Bashahr, 1910*, pg. 49.

Agriculture was crucially dependant on the labour of women and ritually servile agricultural labour, which was not part of the political community either as part of the *bhaichara* or in any other institution of power like the temple or the organs of the Hill State.²² The reiteration of this point is necessary for the present purposes since it is conventional wisdom, and also a certain academic understanding, that Himalayan social relations were based on some form of an egalitarian community of politically equal producers. That agricultural production was based, to a large extent, on the labour of those who had no control on the land on which they worked or the crop which they produced is also important in understanding the nature of production relations and will enable a richer understanding of the contradictions that were present in the social formation of the region at the time of the coming of the British.

This two-way division in the forms of labour, between those who were in control of both their labour and its produce and those without such control, can be seen in most other productive activities. Kolis and similar groups of servile labourers had to tend the flocks of the royal family, the local deity and also the village community.²³ Again here, one finds that the Kolis kept some heads of sheep and goats and other animals for their own subsistence, but most of their labour was given to fulfilling the needs of their 'patrons'.²⁴ The only productive activity

22. 'Throughout the greater portion of the hills, agricultural labour, when not performed by the women of the family, is provided by the hereditary farm servants. These are mainly of the Koli or aboriginal caste.... These *Bethus*, as they are called, receive no wages in cash, but their masters provide them with food two or three times a day, with a complete outfit of clothes once a year, with a house to live in and often with a few acres of land to cultivate for their own benefit. Though they, or their ancestors, have often remained in undisputed possession of the fields thus allotted for many generations, their names were not formerly recorded in the revenue papers, even as tenants-at-will,...for the mutual relation was regarded as that of master and servant and not of landlord and tenant. In return for the benefits received, these servants did the greater part of the field work for their master, tended his cattle, and performed many menial services connected with his house.' H.W. Emerson, op.cit., Chapter III, pp. 13-14.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, pg. 14.

where these servile groups worked with their own tools was in the manufacture of the few rudimentary artisan goods that were needed for the use of the community. Even here they were under the control of the dominant village community, its deity and the ruler of the tract.²⁵ It is important to note here the distinction between those artisan groups which owned their tools and the agricultural labourers who did not own or control the land on which they worked or the tools they used. This difference became important in the later years, with creeping Hindu social distinctions being introduced in the social structure of the region. But this difference refracted unevenly among the artisans, leather workers became relatively depressed while others like carpenters rose in social standing.

Forms of Production

The main forms of production in the Western Himalayas were agriculture, pastoralism and domestic artisan manufacture. Trade was an important element of the Himalayan economy, contributing to the revenues of the Hill State and enabling the exchange of pastoral and forest products for goods required by the pastoralists and peasants. But the relations of the Himalayan villagers with this trade were superficial, and there were local level networks of exchange between them for accessing resources not available within the village limits.

Agriculture

Agriculture was the core of the economy. It produced the bulk of the dietary requirements, enabled the establishment of permanent settlements and provided a large part of the small surplus that was produced. There is evidence of settled agriculture from the seventh century AD at least and it was probably being practised much earlier.²⁶ The geographical zones, with their specific climates and agricultural cycles, have already been discussed in the last chapter and here we will confine ourselves to the manner in which agricultural production was organised. The technology used in agriculture was similar in the

25. *Ibid.*

26. Hutchison, J. and Vogel, J. Ph., *History of Punjab Hill States*, Lahore, 1933, pg. 14.

entire region under consideration. One finds large gradations in the amount of land that each family within the same village or lineage group possessed in spite of the equality of political status and obligations.²⁷ Apart from differences in the amount of land possessed by various families within the same clan, there were also the lands that were under the control of the temples, land of the Rajas and their family members, and various categories of revenue free land grants.

Most of the peasant families possessed land whose produce was not sufficient for their dietary needs, though it provided a socially important part of the total surplus appropriated from the family in the form of food grains and some cash crops.²⁸ The land was under the control of a single family operating from a single homestead but was not concentrated in one place. Rather the usual family holding was often scattered over the various climatic zones and soil types to be found throughout the valley. We have already seen in the last chapter that the productivity of the land depended on the location with regard to irrigation, altitude and proximity to the homestead. Most of the sources from the nineteenth century indicate that land

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27. Some families had land large enough to necessitate the employment of agricultural labour on a regular basis or the leasing out of their land to tenants and some had become indebted agricultural labourers and tenants of other peasants, at least by the second half of the nineteenth century, see Lyall, op.cit., pp. 120–21.
 28. In Kullu in the second half of the nineteenth century the average size of land in the control of one family came to 3 acres, Lyall, op.cit., pg.147; Barnes, in the earliest Land Settlement of the region, gave the average amount of cultivation held by each 'Assamee' as 1.45 acres; in Jubbal state the amount of land held on an average by the proprietary peasants was more than 12 acres, *Jubbal State Settlement, 1907*, pg. 17; in Bushahr the average holding was a little more than six acres in the early twentieth century, *Bashahr, 1910*, pg. 77. Apart from the regional variations this wide difference in the statistics is due to the difficulty of converting the traditional method of measuring land into acres. Land area is computed as the amount of land necessary to cultivate one seed weight, variously called *Bhar* in Kullu, *Joon* in Sirmaur and Bashahr. Every land settlement came up with different ratios for converting from the traditional method to acres. For our purposes here we must remember that even in areas where the average holdings were relatively large the land included very little irrigation and the average yield was low.

under the control of each family was ‘fairly’ scattered with regard to all these factors so that most peasant families had access to some irrigated land and some well manured land near the homestead,²⁹ though it is equally obvious from these very sources that this distribution was far from equal.³⁰

While a majority of the peasantry cultivated their land with family labour, there is evidence of holdings that were too large to be worked on this basis and required inputs of Beth labour even for non-labour intensive operations. These holding were often also those that belonged to families which had a taboo on direct work in agricultural operations. Both such holdings were worked by Beth labourers who were personally tied to the land and its owner, and not to the community as a whole. These holdings included those that were given by the king in recognition of some exemplary service of the landholder or his ancestor, or were given to the high priests of important temples for their maintenance. These titles were known by various names but that is of not great consequence to the nature of the holding. The only distinction within these large holdings which needs to be kept in mind is between those who used Beth labour as the only form of labour on their fields as they had a ritual bar on personally working the land and those who used Beth labour in excess of their regular family labour. Often, though not always, these two claimed affiliation to different ethnic groups.

The last type of agricultural holding was the royal land spread out over all the valleys under the control of that specific Hill State.³¹ At times an entire village would be included in the royal domain.³² The extent of the royal domain was large in relation to the average holding,³³ and assumed exaggerated proportions in the local economy since there was no intermediate holding in many areas of the Western Himalayas between that of the peasant and his ruler.³⁴ There were

29. Emerson, op.cit., Chapter One, pg.10.

30. Lyall, op.cit., pp. 120–22.

31. *Jubbal*, 1910, pg. 26; *Baghal*, 1910, pg. 14; *Nalagarh*, 1910, pg. 20; *Sirmur*, 1934, 109–10.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. ‘... excepting the chief and a few high officials above and a few musicians and out-castes below, the whole society consisted of peasants equal among themselves...’, Lyall, op.cit., pg. 121.

certain Hill States that had a noticeable proportion of the agricultural land under the control of relatives of the ruler and other state officials.

Temples were the only institution, other than the Raja and the royal family, that owned large amounts of land. Some of these land holdings were extensive and encompassed forests, with their resources and grazing runs for the sheep, goats and cattle.³⁵ Very often the entire land under the control of a peasant community or *bhaichara* was the property of the clan's deity to be used by its subjects. One finds that most of the land so claimed by the deity was under the possession of the peasant families whose claims to work the land and use its resources could not be revoked.³⁶ But some land was kept aside specifically for the use of the deity. This land produced the requirements for the daily rituals and community dinning that was a regular feature of all the temples of the Himalayas.³⁷ While the deity claimed a part of the produce of the peasant family; the Bethus, who had to alienate practically the entire produce, worked the land under the deity's direct possession.³⁸

Depending on the climatic zone, there were two harvests that were usual in the hills. The main crop of the winter season was wheat and that of the summer harvest was rice, specially in the irrigated lands. In the unirrigated lands barley was the main winter crop, while in summer maize and many other coarse cereals and millets of local pedigree were grown. Summer was also the time for the cultivation of vegetables in small garden plots. There were some cash crops like tobacco and hemp that were grown in summer and poppy which was grown in winter.³⁹ Most of these crops were the same as grown in

35. Records of the Financial Commission, Government of India, No. 33, pp. 247–64, *Religious Institutions in Kullu of the Kangra District* (based partly on J.B. Lyall's Report on Temple Endowments contained in Lyall, op.cit.), contains extensive accounts of temple holdings, the manner of its cultivation by tenants and their relation to the Hill State. Most other land settlement reports and some gazetteers of the region also contain information on the nature and extent of temple holdings.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 254–57.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 252–53.

38. Emerson, op.cit., Chapter One, pg. 6.

39. G.F. White, op.cit., pg. 57; *Bashahr*, 1910, pp. 47–49; *Keonthal*, 1910, pg. 8; *Nalagarh*, 1910, pg. 11; *Baghal*, 1910, pp. 8–9; *Jubbal*, 1910, pg. 17; *Suket*, 1927, pp. 75–77; *Sirmur*, 1934, pg. 73–76; *Kullu*, 1897, pp. 79–80.

other parts of the sub-continent, apart from various inferior millets and cereals which along with wild growing temperate fruit formed an important part of the hill peoples' diet. The importance of these foods was that they grew with the minimum of labour and water and were highly resistant to weeds and pests. The inferior cereals and millets could also be preserved for long periods, and thus became a type of insurance against starvation and famine.⁴⁰ It was not common for these inferior crops to be grown in the royal lands, which usually were irrigated or were fertile rain fed land, which gave two harvests. The temple lands were sometimes sown with these inferior crops since the temple granaries also functioned as food reservoirs for the peasantry in times of need.⁴¹

Before we end this discussion it is important to remember what we had noted in the last chapter, that these general patterns of cultivation varied according to local climatic conditions and large areas of the Western Himalayas could not grow a winter crop due to severe weather conditions. Many areas could only grow the winter crop in the secluded, warm valleys and not on the exposed fields in the middle and higher reaches.

This apart, even where there were two regular harvests, the summer harvest was the more important one with respect to the variety of crops grown and the surety of production. Therefore the requirement for agricultural labour was maximum during the months of summer, more so in areas where peasants attempted to get two harvests between the spring thawing and the autumn snow.⁴² Winter, consequently, became a period for rest from the more exacting agricultural operations and few calls were made on the reciprocal labour of the *bhaichara* or on the Beth of the Kolis.⁴³

40. Interview with villagers in Gadadi, District Sirmaur, June, 1996, where I was informed that some of these crops could be kept in store for as long as a hundred years without rotting or catching pests. Similar information was provided in village Shillai, District Sirmaur, June 1996. Here I had *rotis* made with such old coarse grain kept in the granary of Deep Chand Tomar's family.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

This form of agriculture, which produced negligible surpluses, necessitated the continuation of modes of production much inferior in their productive capabilities, like pastoralism and foraging in the forests and 'wastes', for the reproduction of life and the sustenance of the structures of the Hill State.

Pastoralism

Pastoralism was the second most important component of the Himalayan economy and was linked with the agricultural cycle in relations that over time came to acquire features that made them symbiotic on each other.⁴⁴ Almost all the climatic zones of the Himalayas had pastoral economies that involved a substantial deployment of the total social labour and other resources in its operations. As noted in the last chapter, there were two types of pastoralism in the region of the study. There was the pastoralism of the nomadic groups like the *Gaddi* and *Gujar* communities and there was the pastoralism of the primarily agricultural communities. Let us first take a brief look at the nature of the pastoral economy of the former.

The Gaddis and the Gujars, like all highland pastoralists had their 'runs' spread out over various climatic zones, the main feature of which was that they took their flocks to the alpine pastures during summer and brought them down into the low hills during winter.⁴⁵ Even though they had permanent homesteads near their summer pastures, greater value was placed on the control of specific grazing 'runs', which were inherited over generations by each community and family.⁴⁶ While it is important to stress the nomadic nature of their life, it should be mentioned that agriculture was also an important part of their productive activities.⁴⁷ The Gaddi villages, near their alpine pastures, were used for cultivating crops that had a short growing season and did not require intensive labour, while their flocks grazed

44. Chetan Singh, *Natural Premises: Ecology and Peasant Life in the Western Himalaya 1800–1950*, Delhi, 1998, Chapter Four, pp. 117–136, gives a good account of the rhythm of pastoral life in the region of our study.

45. *Ibid.*, see specially pp. 120–21; *Kullu*, 1897, pg. 93.

46. *Ibid.*, pg. 127.

47. Lyall, op.cit., pg. 38.

nearby. The importance of this agricultural involvement of the Gaddis cannot be over stressed. It proved crucial to the survival of the Gaddis by providing them food that was not easily available in surplus in the agricultural areas of the Himalayas. This feature of the Gaddi economy is also of vital importance to the study since it indicates that there were perhaps no pure agriculturists or pure pastoralists in the Himalayas at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The point of distinction in categorising a community agricultural or pastoral can only be the relative importance of the specified activity to their total economy.

Since pastoral wealth was the mainstay of the nomadic pastoral communities, this also became the focus of power in these societies. All the brothers owned the pastoral wealth but it was usual, as in the agricultural communities, for the elder brother(s) to represent the family interests in trade and in the affairs of the community.⁴⁸ They never parted from their herds. During winter when these pastoral groups moved into the lower hills bordering the plains of Punjab, some old members of the family who were no longer in a position to travel and who had therefore lost their primary position inside the family, continued residence in the high mountain village sites, very often on the margin of death due to starvation and cold.

The main difference between the herds of the pastoralists discussed above and those of the agricultural communities was that the latter were usually smaller in number per family and that these herds had a more geographically restricted grazing 'run'.⁴⁹ Unlike in the pastoral communities, the younger brother or children in an agricultural family or the subservient Kolis were charged with moving the herds in their seasonal migration. Many sources on the pastoral practices of the agricultural communities show that it was common practice to bunch the herds of neighbouring families together and put them under the charge of a group of herdsmen, whether junior family members or

48. *Ibid.*, pg. 39; *Lahul*, 1897, pg. 49; *Chamba*, 1904, pg. 279.

49. In Kullu the local climate enabled most of the flock to remain within the confines of the Beas river valley moving up and down the mountain side with the change of seasons; A.H. Diack, *Revised Settlement-Kullu subdivision of Kangra District*, 1898, pg. 36. In some other parts of the Western Himalayas the peasant flocks had to move much further than this as in Mandi, Bashahr, Sirmur and Jubbal; *Mandi*, 1920, pp. 148–49; *Bashahr*, 1910, pg. 53; *Sirmur*, 1904, pg. 70.

some servile Kolis.⁵⁰ The nomadic pastoralists travelled from the borders of the trans-Himalayan ranges till the foothills and plains of Punjab, whereas the herds of the agriculturists mostly travelled from the higher reaches of the valley of their residence to its lower reaches, though there are a few examples of seasonal migrations over longer areas.

The herds of the agricultural communities were usually grazed on pastures, which belonged to the domain of their clan deity, and thus they claimed special rights on them. Not only were these pastures free for their use, in many cases the agricultural communities did not have to pay even when their herds crossed the boundary of the neighbouring Hill States, due to reciprocal arrangements with neighbouring communities.⁵¹

Pastoral wealth was of great importance to the agricultural communities, leading many observers to believe that it was crucial to their survival.⁵² It provided them protein, specially in the winter months, wool for their homespun cloth, various dairy products for consumption and revenue. While agriculture remained dominant in the economy of these communities, they could not forsake occupations like pastoralism and even foraging and gathering to survive in the inhospitable geography of these mountains. On the other side, one finds that pastoral communities too could not survive exclusively on the wealth of their sheep, goats and cattle and had to involve a part of their population for a part of the year in agriculture. The primary reason for this being that the agricultural communities could not produce surplus enough for the sustenance of non-agricultural populations and also the hill state.

Artisan and Domestic Manufacture

The last form of production to be found in the Western Himalayas at the beginning of the nineteenth century was artisan production. The volume of production was low, even by the standards of a primitive agrarian economy but the level of technology, in some aspects, was

50. *Bashahr*, 1910, ibid., *Sirmur*, 1904, ibid.

51. Lyall op.cit., pg130.

52. Chetan Singh, op.cit., pp. 28–9, 117, 123–130.

surprisingly advanced. This production was of two types, domestic and specialist.

Most of the domestic production was of woollen cloth, the spinning and weaving being done entirely by women.⁵³ The overwhelming majority of the population wore woollen clothes, which were produced from the wool of their own sheep, though often some cotton cloth was procured from markets and fairs. Both the spinning and weaving were done by hand and stray references to the use of rudimentary looms within the household are also found.⁵⁴ Cotton, as a product of daily wear, was only used by the rulers and some rich trading families in the few towns of the region, silk being even rarer.⁵⁵ There were other things like collecting honey, making various milk products, which were crucial both to the peasant diet and for payment of dues, and brewing liquors⁵⁶ which were part of domestic production along with other minor activities.

The other form of artisan production was of the various menial and servile groups that have already been noticed earlier in the chapter. The various skills that were found in the hills were the masons, the carpenters, the smiths and the shoemakers and leather workers.⁵⁷ One finds quite a few references to the production of iron from ore that was found in many parts of these mountains.⁵⁸ Using charcoal, which was produced from the timber available locally, the ore was smelted. Water mills were another notable feature of the region which were made and operated at various places for grinding wheat and other cereals and millets.⁵⁹ Some of the rivers on important routes were

53. *Ibid.*, pg. 273.

54. *Ibid.*, pg. 274, '... the cloth, also, is woven by hand.' 'A single frame formed of split bamboo is employed, through which the threads are passed to keep them separate. I believe that there is no machinery of greater complication used. Nothing more nearly approaching to a loom is used throughout the hills.'; George Francis White, op.cit., pg. 97.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Kullu, 1897*, pp. 97–100.

57. *Simla District Gazetteer, 1888–89*, pp. 70–71.

58. Fraser, op.cit., pp. 173, 236–7, 267;

59. Capt. F.V. Raper, *Narrative of a Survey for the Purpose of Discovering the Sources of the Ganges*, Asiatic Researches, 1810, Vol. XI, pg. 465, Kullu, 1897, pg. 74, Fraser, op. cit., pg. 210, 'The operation of reducing it [rice]

bridged in the most elaborate fashion using more than twenty full-grown Deodar trees, which involved a high level of skill and the combined labour of many carpenters.⁶⁰ The common house construction of the hills showed a high degree of complexity and skill – much remarked on by the British travellers. These houses were two to three storeys high, made entirely of wood, locally hewn stone and roofed with slates.⁶¹

There were various other skills that were found in the hills like bamboo working, rope making, bow and arrow making, collecting special plants from the forests, etcetera but the people involved in these were very few or often not a specific group but rather provided these skills to the community as and when the need arose. Other skills like playing music for the village deity at various functions, conducting necessary rituals for the success of the agricultural and pastoral seasons, etcetera were also important for the reproduction of the hill communities, though they did not involve any production of use value as such. It must be kept in mind that it was extremely rare to find any family wholly subsisting on their artisan production,⁶² agriculture being almost always the main ‘breadwinner’, either on land under ones possession or on land belonging to somebody else.

Trade and Exchange

Both the pastoral groups and the agricultural populations were involved in the trans-Himalayan trade that passed through the region. It will be useful to take a brief look at the nature of this trade, that is its volume and value, the goods and the people involved in it. This trade enabled the conversion of some part of the produce of these mountainous regions into cash, which in its turn was crucial to the

to meal is chiefly performed by water-mills; which, by an exceedingly simple contrivance, turn two stones contrary ways.' 'At times, four or five of these are seen, one above another, all working at the same time.'

60. Raper, op.cit., pg. 509; George Francis White, op.cit., pp. 62–3, 83, and a sketch of one such bridge in Plate XII.

61. *Ibid.*, pg. 60.

62. There were some families which were primarily artisans, like goldsmiths, some carpenters and some workers at the iron foundries mentioned by Fraser.

formation and existence of the Hill State. The introduction of cash into the region, from this trade, is important since it links up with the discussion on the issue of monetisation in the pre-British period. This trans-Himalayan trade was paralleled by the local networks of exchange between the valleys and settlements of the Himalayas. These networks of exchange were self-contained with respect to the goods involved, negligible amounts of it consisted of goods that were imported from the plains or from distant part of the mountain chain. This local network enabled the optimal use of the available resources within its spread by the different peasant communities that resided there. Unlike the trans-Himalayan trade, there was no cash involved in these exchanges. Goods and services were exchanged for each other according to long accepted ratios, which were legitimised through religious rituals, community traditions and such other 'non-economic' practices.

One is handicapped because most of the data on the volumes and value of the trade comes one from British sources from the second half of the nineteenth century, by which time the abolition of customs and other duties of the Hill States,⁶³ the growing restrictions on the British border in the high Himalayas, and British policies which attempted to control the Himalayan trade meant that the character of this trade had seen some major changes from the pre-British period. While it is possible to discover some basic trends of the pre-British trade on the basis of this evidence, these enable only tentative remarks on the patterns of trade which are useful in understanding the working of the Western Himalayan political economy.

The volume of trade and the value of the products involved is considered here. The first detailed account of the trade in the region of study is from a 1868 Report on the 'Lavi' trade fair of Rampur-Bashahr.⁶⁴ This trade fair was, and still is, held in the beginning of November, just before the winter snows make access to the trans-Himalayan regions difficult, even through the valley of the Sutlej. This

63. As part of the Sanads granted to the Hill States at the conclusion of the Anglo-Gurkha war, all customs and duties charged by these states were abolished and these rights were transferred to the British government.

64. Records of the Financial Commission, Government of India, No. 14, 1868, *Rampoor Fair*, OIOC, (henceforth *Rampoor Fair*) pp. 60–64.

fair has historically been part of the larger trans-Himalayan and Central Asian trade network and its timing coincides with the end of an annual cycle of travel and trade for the pastoral traders of the trans-Himalayan region.⁶⁵ At this fair, goods from the plains were exchanged for the products of the Himalayan region. Most of the exchange was done through mechanisms of barter. Even the records of 1868 show that, of the total value of more than two lakh, twenty one thousand rupees of merchandise, only a little more than sixty nine thousand were sold for cash giving a relative feel of the ratio of cash to barter.⁶⁶ The report also notes that the total volume was a decline from earlier amounts, an epidemic of cholera being the immediate cause, but more importantly, the encouragement given by the British to other rival trade routes – through Palampur and from Leh to Kashmir – having diverted a considerable part of the trade, which originally came through the Sutlej valley.⁶⁷

There is evidence that goods from the trans-Himalayan regions, from the plains of Punjab and the Ganga-Yamuna Doab, from the Beas river valley (Kullu), and from the host Bushahr state were brought to be traded here. The goods of the trans-Himalayan traders (which include those from the Kinnaur, or Chini, region of Bushahr state, a fact to remember when we discuss the formation and nature of the Hill States) made up more than half the value of the goods at the fair. The total value of the goods and cash brought to this fair, deep inside the Himalayas, by the traders from the plains was estimated at Rs 1,16,441, annas 10, paise 7, or 53% of the total value. Together the traders of the trans-Himalayan region and those from the plains of Hindustan made up 94% of the value of the trade of this fair. The contribution of the local Bushahr state and the adjoining Kullu valley, areas representing the middle Himalayas, was peripheral and did not in any way influence the nature of the fair or the trade of which it was a part. The total value of the Kullu goods was Rs 8,300, annas 4,

65. G.C. Barnes, *Memorandum on the District of Bussahir; and the Pacification of the Disaffected Portion of its Inhabitants*, Selections from the Records of the Punjab Government, Vol. V, No. 4, 1859–60, OIOC, pp. 107–8 (henceforth Barnes, *Memorandum*); Bashahr, 1910, pp. 60–63.

66. *Rampoor Fair*, op.cit., pp. 62–3.

67. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–1.

and the value of the Bushahr goods participating in this fair was a measly Rs 3,429, annas 12, paise 9.

Five items made up more than 98% of the estimated value of Rs 1,39,953, and 8 annas, of the trans-Himalayan goods. These items were normal sheep wool, estimated at approximately Rs 40,520; pushum wool worth Rs 77,640; charrus worth Rs 10,080; goodma dohur lank a local herb used as medicine and spice, worth Rs 6,050; and Himalayan ponies at Rs 3,750. Most of these were traded for jewels, utensils, cloth, and food items like wheat, sugar, spices, etcetera apart from cash, by the trans-Himalayan traders. Of this amount more than 56% was cash and the rest made up the commodities mentioned above.

In all these figures one finds a few noteworthy points which indicate the general nature of the trade of the region under study. The most important point is that the Himalayan regions, as distinct from the trans-Himalayan regions, were almost totally unconnected with the large volumes of trade that passed through its heart – the main river valleys. From other sources of the early nineteenth century one finds that whatever little trade involvement that was recorded here, was from the immediate valley of the Sutlej and from one or two points in the Kullu valley. The rest of the region was unconnected with the Himalayan trade network. The second point of significance is that almost all the money brought to the fair is by the traders from the plains and most of it goes to their main trading partners, the trans-Himalayan traders, very little cash gets into the local economy, and most of that is confined to the main river valley, which is also the route taken by the traders. The third point of importance is that animals, animal products and some cash crops like hemp constitute more than 97% of the value of the goods that the mountain men bring for trading at the fair. Agricultural and artisan products and goods gathered from the forests, and what the British labelled ‘wastes’, constituted an insignificant proportion of the value of their goods. This proportion is an indicator of the importance of pastoralism to the economy of the region.

The one significant aspect of this nineteenth century trade was the involvement of the local population in the carriage of the goods from the plains to such trade fairs and other permanent markets that existed

inside the valleys of the Himalayas.⁶⁸ The trans-Himalayan traders came with their beasts of burden, the sheep and goats, the ponies and yaks, laden with their merchandise and the animals themselves being articles of sale. But the traders from the plains could not negotiate the narrow mountain paths with animals of the plains and had to either hire fresh animals at points in the foothills or take men of the mountains as porters who were paid both in money and in kind.⁶⁹ The earnings of this labour was at times necessary to the agricultural families for the payment of specific dues to the Hill State and the local deity, though, like pastoralism, it did not constitute the main economic activity of the family.

Another significant aspect of this Himalayan trade was its link to the origin and development of the Hill State. By bringing goods from all parts of the Himalayan and Central Asian mountain system into contact with the traders and goods of Hindustan this trade enabled the Hill State to control the movement of goods in a manner which enabled them to maximise the earnings through custom imposts, duties and other demands.⁷⁰ The Himalayan state was able to appropriate a part of the resources and wealth of areas beyond its political control which added to its revenues in an area where the possibility of appropriating the agricultural surplus was severely limited due to geographical and other reasons. This trade also enabled the transformation of a significant part of the pastoral wealth of the region into cash for the State.

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68. Capt. D. Briggs, *Report on the Operations Connected With the Hindostan and Thibet Road, from 1850–1855*, Selections from the Records of the Government of India, (Public Works Department), No. XVI, 1856, OIOC, pp.6–7.
 69. Ibid. pg. 3, ‘To assist in these laborious tasks (carrying burdens up the mountain paths), the people of the plains were found to be completely unfit. The long rugged ascents and the narrow tortuous footpaths of the hillmen were scarcely practicable to them under any circumstances, and wholly impossible when laden. Thus the whole duty fell upon the scanty population of the Hill States, ...’; also see Fraser, op.cit., pp. 212–3, 248, 256–7, 264–5, 274, 283–7, 301–10, among many other references.
 70. *Ibid.*; also Chetan Singh, op.cit., Chapters One and Six, has a comprehensive discussion of the nature and influence of these trade networks.

The Interdependence of Production

It is but obvious that forms of production within a given social formation would have an interdependent nature and this interdependence of production was reflected in the political and social institutions of the people, the most well known historical feature of which was the structure of the family based on remnants of group marriage, labelled polyandry by the British and all later writers. Here one shall look at the nature of the interdependence between the different forms of production. Rather than looking at this interdependence as so many specific events, it may be better to see them as processes that meet at particular junctures, mostly in a symbiotic relation. This method of understanding the productive activities of the people would imply that agriculture was a continuous process over many years with a rhythm that was conditioned by the seasons, rather than merely a sum of various specific forms of labour repeated at regular intervals.

This perspective on the nature of productive activities is more appropriate, because to understand agricultural operations one has to begin much before the first seed has been sown or the first furrow ploughed. The labour put in to terrace the valley gradient and to cut the irrigation channel is very much part of the entire operation. Even for the crops which were grown in rotation, wherever the climate and topography allowed, a cycle of four to six growing seasons was necessary for the most effective use of the lands' fertility and for producing the greatest variety of food crops that were feasible.⁷¹ This variety of crops and their spread over various fields over various growing seasons was the Himalayan peasants' insurance against famine and declining fertility of the soil. It was in the rotation of crops and the attempt to preserve the land's fertility that the closest link developed between pastoralism and agriculture. Similarly, the need to continuously move with the flocks according to the season in search of the best pastures, so that both flocks and pastures did not get

71. Raper, op.cit., pg. 471; *Kullu, 1897*, op.cit., pg. 80; also see Lyall, op.cit., pp. 142–43 for the different crops that were grown by the Kullu peasants; *Sirmur, 1934*, op.cit., pg. 74; the peasants of village Gadadi in the Giri valley of Sirmaur too gave this information.

exhausted, provided conditions which encouraged involvement with agriculture.

Migrations of the pastoral herds followed an annual cycle. When the snow began to thaw on the mountaintops and alpine pastures, the herds of sheep and goats began moving up from the low hills and valleys, where they had spent the winter. This migration coincided with the beginning of agricultural operations for Kharif or the summer crop. On their way up these herds had to pass agricultural lands, where they were penned in the fields for the nights, their droppings serving as manure.⁷² They also grazed the stumps of harvested crops of the Rabi or winter harvest, in places where it was possible to do double cropping. A similar pattern was followed when these herds came back during autumn on their migration to the low hills and valleys. The social relations which enabled this fertilising and grazing of stumps by these herds were extremely complex, depending on the ownership of the herds, the political rights of the state, the relative necessity of the pastoralists and the agriculturists for manure or safe pens, etcetera but will not be discussed here.⁷³ One finds a similar interdependence between forests, agriculturists and pastoralists.

This interdependence that has been discussed above operated at two levels. There was the interdependence of the peasant family (or, for that matter, the pastoral family) on two, often three and more, productive activities for their survival. No single productive activity produced enough for the complete dietary and revenue requirements of the peasant family, and thus they had to combine agriculture with pastoralism, and these two with foraging and gathering in the forests and wastes. But there was another, deeper interdependence that seems to have been central to the working of the Himalayan economy.

72. Lyall, *Ibid.*, pp. 131–33; Kullu, 1897, *Ibid.*

73. All Land Settlement Reports and Gazetteers from the time of Barnes Settlement of Kangra in the early 1850s contain detailed information about sheep runs, grazing rights on pastures, claims of different groups on land, forests, etcetera, the payment of dues to the village communities or the State, and many other such facts. It also seems that the documents pertaining to the Kullu region contain much more detailed information on this topic than the documents from other parts of the Western Himalayas.

No single productive process was self-sufficient in itself. It needed the resources of the other productive processes to sustain itself. While it may be possible to argue for the self sustainability of the mountain economy as a whole, as some writers have done,⁷⁴ no single production process could fully sustain its own reproduction. This analysis shows a much deeper level of vulnerability of the economy and the people dependent on it, than was usually the case in most pre-modern agricultural communities of the plains. It is important to keep this vulnerability in mind since it conditions the emergence and functioning of the entire political economy that grew on it.

The Sphere of Politics

Structure of Political Authority

There were two forms of political authority, one based on the control of territory and the other based on control over filiative communities or lineages. These existed parallel to each other and many of their functions and powers overlapped, leading to frequent struggles over political supremacy. Seen in the context of a long time frame of a millennium, it seems that the emergent States were gaining supremacy over the lineages in the Western Himalayas. But this struggle was far from over at the time that they were subdued, first by the Gurkhas and then by the British.

Authority based on Control over Lineages

The main source of authority within the peasant community or clan was the clan deity. It had a say in most matters of public and personal concern of the members of the clan and exercised this say regularly. The will of the deity was expressed through the medium of its oracle or *Goor*. He and other divine functionaries like the *Kardar*, or keeper of the deity's stores, the *Purohit* and *Pujari*, priests, etcetera carried out the work on behalf of the deity. These functionaries were usually chosen by the deity itself from among its subjects and remained in office at its pleasure. The selection of these divine functionaries was

74. The latest and perhaps, most comprehensive, argument for this position is Chetan Singh, op.cit.

through various means en-dash divine possession and miracles forming a prominent part of these.⁷⁵ The point of importance is that these functionaries were deposed and others from the community appointed in their place, if, and when, they were found inefficient in conducting the common affairs. This was seen as a failure in conveying the will of the deity to the community, usually due to some form of corruption or disobedience to the divine power which resulted in the removal of the divine mandate. Frequent cases of the transfer of divine communion from one *Goor* to another can be found, specially in situations when the weather predictions go wrong for many seasons, a major calamity strikes the clan or some decision is seen to be patently false. Decisions relating to the activities of the agricultural and pastoral cycles, disputes and problems among its subjects and the relations of the clan with its neighbours and the Hill State were all decided by the deity through its functionaries.

Unlike the clan deity and its power which was supernatural, there was a secular source of authority within the clan called the *Khumri*. It comprised of all the families of the clan and its generic institution was the general body composed of one male representative of each constituent family. Its members were politically equal, a status which derived from their belonging to lineages with a common patron deity. There was an officer, variously known as the *Seana*, the *Ruhud* and the *Mawana*, who headed this *Khumri* and represented it in its dealings with the hill state and other similar communities. The subservient agricultural labourers and village menials were excluded from its membership and could not take part in the decision making process. The *Khumri* decided on various day-to-day matters of the community, specially those dealing with the revenue demands of the Hill State. It was normal practice for the Hill State to levy a certain amount of revenue demand, in kind and labour service, on every community and it devolved on the *Khumri* to apportion this demand within its constitutive families. Matters pertaining to the use of common resources, specially the pastures, hay fields and forests were also decided in the *Khumri*.

75. The manner of divine selection and divine control over the affairs of the community are richly illustrated in Rose, Glossary, op.cit.; and in Emerson, op.cit. The gazetteers of these areas also contain much that is of interest on this aspect of the peoples' life.

It seems that the head of the *Khumri* was traditionally elected from among all its members, though, at the time of the British conquest, there was a definite trend towards converting this office into a hereditary one.

Even so, there were strong checks on the power of the head of the *Khumri*. First, from the oracles and priests of the deity and second, from the lack of any strong social hierarchy within the community, which could legitimise the innate superiority of the *Seana*'s person or shore up his personal claim over his political authority. As late as the second decade of the twentieth century, one finds a situation of near revolt among the peasants of one such community due to the overbearing attitude of the village headman.⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that the oracle of the clan deity was one of the complainants in this case and claimed that he spoke not for himself but for the clan god.

The *Khumri* deliberated on practically all matters concerning the daily functioning of the clan. But its authority was subject to that of the deity who was the heavenly ruler of the clan. Peasants aggrieved at the decisions of the *Khumri* could turn to the deity for redress but not the other way around. The elected nature of the *Seana* contrasted with the divine appointment of the deity's functionaries. The *Khumri* was the medium through which the Himalayan peasant communicated with the territorial State, paid his revenue demand, regulated his Begar dues and expressed his acceptance of its legitimacy. The divine officials, as a collective and singly, controlled the social life of the clan, regulated the agricultural cycle and administered the legal code of the people. There were some areas of overlap, like the management of social relations where both had a say but the distinct areas of authority were well marked within the community. Any dispute between these two centres of authority was always decided in favour of the clan deity.

The deity regulated the inner life of the *Khumri*, body which seems to have represented the 'General Will' of the clan.

76. Sir H.W. Emerson, op.cit., Chapter XI, pg. 16: '...[the headman] lords over us, and when we complain to him, he just twirls his moustache *as though he were not of the same brotherhood*. We will not have him as our headman; unless he is dismissed, we will leave our villages and settle in another State.' emphasis mine.

The primary political and social identity of a person was his/her allegiance to the lineage. The specific family and the site of its homestead were sub-identities of this identity. The association with the larger clan and tribe was made possible through the membership of this lineage. The duties and rights accruing on a family and its individual members were the consequence of their belonging to the lineage-clan, expressed through the membership of the *Khumri* and tutelage to their deity. The standing of a particular family and its relations with others within the lineage and with those who were of different (and sometimes hostile) lineages was related to their lineage identity. Territorial control, resource mobilisation or place of residence had nothing to do with one's position within the local political structure.

There were important consequences of such a political identity. The first was that the demands of revenue by the Hill State had to be borne by all the members of the clan irrespective of the amount of resources they controlled. Similarly, the demands of the clan deity was also not graded by the amount of resources controlled by its individual subjects. There are frequent references to the absence of any link between the amount of land owned by a peasant and the revenue due to the State. Only by committing suicide or by long distance migration could a subject free himself of the demands of the State and his deity. Even the outright sale or alienation of all claims on his land would not absolve him of his duties, or put another way, would not remove the demands on the peasant. Alienation of land or other property claims was an extremely rare occurrence. There were infrequent cases of the partition of land between brothers, but even this was discouraged by the *Khumri* as well as by the State through instruments such as social opprobrium and heavy fines and taxes. In situations where there was alienation of land – either through transfer of one's ancestral claim, mortgage, or partition between brothers – the demands of the State or the deity for revenue and Begar did not change with the addition or the loss of land or other resources. It remained the same. This was perhaps the biggest impediment to the establishment of a land market even in areas that were exposed to commerce and money.

The second consequence was that there existed no conception of ownership of land, at least within the peasant clans. The families of

the clan had *possession for use* of all the resources within the domain of their deity. Some were held under common possession, like the pastures, forests and water sources. Other resources, specially agricultural land, cattle, sheep & goats, the homestead, and such things were held by individual families whose claims could not be transgressed by others. There were some resources that could be held both individually and in common, like water mills, irrigation channels, pastures and fruit trees. But this was not akin to absolute control that would be central to any concept of private property. This form of land right in combination with the factors discussed above made it impossible for the emergence of a land market, however rudimentary, until the entire legal structure was transformed and money injected into the economy.

A third, and perhaps most crucial for the historical development of political institutions in the region, was the specific nature of the State that emerged from this condition of pre – eminence of the clan deity in the affairs of the community. Emerson traces the development of kingship in Bashahr, Mandi and their neighbouring states to the transformation of the temporal powers of the clan deity's officials, specially the oracle or *Goor*. He illustrates the transformation in the nature of this divine office through the various remnants of earlier practices that still remain and the myths and legends that make up both the theory of divinity and the theory of kingship in the Western Himalayas. It may be because of this that rulers in these mountains, even in the most developed states, never successfully overcame the influence of the deity over their authority and remained, at best, powerful vice-regents or personifications of these deities. What demarcates them from the political authority of the clan deities was that the political authority of the ruler of the Hill State was exercised over a specific territory and not directly over lineages or clans which could shift both their allegiance and their residence.

Authority based on Control of Territory

The first evidence of State formation in the Western Himalayas is from the eighth century AD in Chamba⁷⁷ and perhaps even earlier in Kullu,⁷⁸

77. Hutchison and Vogel, op.cit., pp. 14, 'The oldest inscription by a Rana is at Gun, in the Upper Ravi Valley, and it records the erection of a temple

that is, from the valleys of the Ravi and the Beas rivers. Other States like Mandi, Suket,⁷⁹ Bilaspur,⁸⁰ Nalagarh,⁸¹ Sirmaur⁸² all came into existence in the period between the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries. These States were situated in the lower Himalayas or Siwaliks, which had a larger proportion of agricultural land compared to other areas deeper into the mountains, and were also closer to the plains. These two factors made them more amenable to social and political

by one Ashadha, who calls himself a *samanta* or feudatory of Raja Meru-Varman, (AD 700).'

78. *Ibid.*, pg. 18.
79. The Rajas, along with those of Mandi, Keonthal and Kashtwar, claim descent from the Sen dynasty of Bengal which was deposed by Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1198 AD. Be that as it may calculations based on oral traditions put the origin of the dynasty about eighth century. By the fifteenth century records show the giving of land grants to Brahmins, the establishment of some revenue collecting administration and in 1520 AD the new capital was also established. See Gazetteer of the Suket State, 1927 (compiled by B.R. Beotra), reprint New Delhi, 1997, pp. 9–13, 19–20.
80. The line of the Bilaspur Rajas is traced to 697 AD in historical records and they trace their descent from Sishupal, a character in the Mahabharata. But the stability of the dynasty's rule seems not older than 1653 when the present capital was established. See Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States, 1910 Bilaspur, pp. 3–6.
81. The ruling dynasty traces itself from one branch of the Bilaspur ruling family. The first references to Nalagarh (or Hindur) are from 1100 AD but again this state stabilised only around the time of Timur's invasion and after (1399–1477) when the capital was established, revolts put down and an administration organised for the entire tract.
82. The present dynasty assumed power after a flood in the Giri swept away the older capital and its Raja in the eleventh century. They claim descent from Ugar Sain Rawal of Jaisalmer, who was requested by some people of the tract to assume sovereignty in the absence of any ruler. The earliest reference to this State is from the year 1236 AD in the chronicle *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*. Though it is not possible to point to the precise period when State institutions stabilised here, records from the reign of Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb clearly indicate a well developed State structure and this was one of the few States which had some form of regular contact with the Mughal powers. See Gazetteer of the Sirmur State, 1934, Part A, (reprinted) New Delhi, 1996, pp. 9, 12–15.

influences from the riverine plains. But even at the time of the British conquest, the power of these Hill States was severely circumscribed by the existence of independent minded peasant communities organised in clans. Some of these clans retained much of their independence within these States. Many of them were recognised by the British as tiny independent Hill States and constituted the main group of the Simla Hill States. These were collectively called the *Athara Thakurai* by the local population though the total number of the Simla Hill States was thirty in 1910.⁸³ A *Thakurai* was less than a full fledged State by their conception. Though some of them had relatively large territories and could properly be called a hill state, many were exceedingly small, comprising as few as four villages and populations as little as 170.⁸⁴ Of these thirty *Athara Thakurais* almost twenty were in reality only clan polities and not States, where the ruler was little more than the head of a group of villages comprising one or two clans. But this distinction was lost on the conquering British who granted similar status to all forms of political authority in the Western Himalayas and thus converted these 'tribal' chiefs into 'sovereign' rulers.

The most striking fact about the States in the Western Himalayas is the fact that every single ruling dynasty of the region claimed its origin from ancestors who belonged to the high caste groups from the plains. In a few instances there seems to be some evidence to link these dynasties with persons who had immigrated to these mountains from the plains, but often there seems to be little to distinguish this from the equally strong claim about their descent from mythical characters like Ram, Krishna or even Sishupal of the Mahabharata! The insistence on tracing descent to ancestors whose origin marks them as different from the social fabric of the Himalayas served a very important function, irrespective of the historical merits of the claim. It was necessary for the king of an emergent State to mark himself out from the clans, which inhabited this region. Unless this was done the

83. This included those who were the feudatories of the larger Hill States like Bashahr, Keonthal and Jubbal. See, Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States, 1910, op.cit.

84. *Report on the Census of the Punjab, 1881*, Vol. III, Appendix B, (Final Tables for Native States).

equalising nature of social relations within the lineages and clans would make it impossible to establish a separation from the political community which would be essential for the emergence of any State. The lengthy descriptions by Emerson of the emergence of secular rulers within clans amply illustrate the nature of obstacles that clan polities put on the development of State structures independent from it. Therefore, it was essential for the emergence of the State that its human embodiment be of a markedly different ancestry than the local populace.

This separation was effected by two methods. First was the elaborate *Vansavalis*, or genealogies, of the ruling dynasty that were kept by all ruling dynasties and chiefs who had pretensions to kingship. These gave their owners the status of high caste Rajputs similar to that claimed by most of the Hindu rulers in the plains. They did so by distinguishing the royal family from the rest of the population at the moment of its origin. In association with this was the insistence of the royal families on following orthodox caste practices as set out for high born Rajputs, thus emphasising their difference vis-à-vis the Khash population in matters of daily routine. The fact that this distinction was not securely grounded and could be erased easily within a couple of generations is illustrated by the numerous examples of cultivating peasant families, who claimed descent from a younger son or brother of some earlier king who had lost their caste status, and were indistinguishable from the rest of the population even in matters like marriage relations and food habits. In both these ventures, the royal families relied heavily on the services of Brahmins from the plains who, along with their patrons, formed oases of orthodox Hinduism in a pagan world.

The second method for effective social separation between the royal family and the rest of the population was by assuming the mantle of divinity. In almost all the Hill States in the region of study, the ruler was a vice-regent of the chief god of the tract and ruled at his behest. This was coupled with the pomp and show that he could manage with the sparse resources that these mountainous regions put at his command. Though the pomp of the Himalayan court might seem quaint in comparison with its counterparts in the plains, it was still central to shoring up the authority of the ruler among his subjects.

There were some officials involved in the running of the administration, the most important of them being the *Wazeer*. His primary duty was the assessment and collection of the revenue and other taxes and he also coupled as the ruler's chief advisor. There were other officials with every State having posts and duties that were unique to them. Among them they shared the duty of administering finances of the States. Most of the work involved in the maintenance of law and order and adjudication was the responsibility of the clan institutions and deities. Therefore, the main responsibility of the State officials was in the collection of revenue. It is interesting to note that even in this the State was often circumscribed by the traditional powers of others. In some States, like Bashahr and Jubbal, the appointment of the *Wazeer* was not the prerogative of the king but was part of the tradition of sharing power between the ruler and other powerful clans. In both these States there were three *Wazeers* who were in charge of different tracts within the kingdom, and belonged to families which had hereditary rights to Wazeership. They assessed the revenue, collected it, heard appeals against the judgements of the *Khumri* and *Seana*, and were responsible for the general maintenance of peace in their tract. They were bound to give a certain portion of the revenue collected to the king and bow to his authority in all matters, but if records from the earliest years of British rule are an indication, they enjoyed a high level of independence. Their king could not depose them easily and every year it was a struggle to get his dues from the revenue they collected. In some other States like Mandi, the king was at much greater personal freedom in deciding his officials and was in proper control of his realm, within the general bounds of sharing power with the clan institutions at the ground level.

Many of these States like Bashahr, Mandi, Bilaspur, Nalagarh, Suket, Kullu, Sirmaur and Chamba had small armies and small weapons which were used as often against rebellious clans as against other States. These armies were inferior even to those which were maintained by their neighbours like the Kangra and Gurkha kings who defeated every hill army they faced. Some of them were able to harass their stronger enemies and defend part of their kingdom only because the terrain made it difficult for any army to penetrate into the interior. There were separate establishments for the maintenance of the musket and other arms with the State and also for some of the

horses and elephants that they maintained, mainly for pomp and show.

The royal family, which included the king, his mother, wives, children, younger brothers, uncles and first cousins, held large agricultural tract as personal land, which was known as *Bassa*. These lands were usually quite extensive and every region within a kingdom would have some tracts, often the most fertile, reserved as the private property of the royal family. These were the only consistently large land holdings that were to be found in these mountains, apart from a few exceptions. In some States, a few of the higher officials managed to corner large tracts of land through royal grants and other not so legal means. The clearest example of this was in Mandi, where most of the officials belonged to the small, closed community of Punjabi Khatris resident there for many generations. They manned the top posts of the State and also were large landowners, which added to their administrative clout and personal wealth.

Political authority based on control of territory had no social base independent of the clan polity. In all the States of the region under study the royal prerogative had legal sanction because the king usually was the vice-regent of the main deity of the tract. This deity had a dual position. It was the god of the royal family and had special links with it because the king was assumed to be its son, minister, or some sort of a confidant. Parallel to this was its position as overlord of the different clan and other divinities within its domain. There was a large area of overlap between the royal god's realm and that of its temporal representative, though they never were identical.⁸⁵ This arrangement implied two things. First, it necessarily preserved the

85. Therefore, we find that in Bashahr, most of the local gods and other supernatural powers were related hierarchically to the royal god Bhima Kali at Sarahan. But there were other gods too within the tract ruled by the Bashahr king which did not accept the overlordship of Bhima Kali. Similar was the case in Kullu, where all the subservient gods and divinities came to pay their respects to their overlord, Raghunath at Sultanpur, at Dussehra; a tradition which has survived intact to become one of the most spectacular tourist attractions of present day Himachal Pradesh. Similarly in Mandi, the occasion for paying respects to the royal god was the Shivratri festival. All States in the Western Himalayas had similar festivals.

position of the clan deities by making their overlord the legal ruler of the tract. This maintained the alternative source of political authority – the clan with its *Khumri*. This leads to the second point. Institutions of State power independent of the clan deity never had a chance of growing within the local population and remained dependent on them. Surplus appropriation, judicial administration and the legitimisation of authority remained confined to the forms and institutions which were an intrinsic part of the clan polities. Their use for purposes of working the Hill State strengthened their legitimacy among the local population. This point is further explored in the following section that discusses the relation between the centres of authority based on clan and on territory.

Relation between the Two Centres of Political Authority

It has been seen that there were two centres of political authority in the pre-British Western Himalayas, the Hill State and the clan deity. It is now possible to mark the point of distinction in the nature of their authority. The clan deity ruled over men and not over territory. While it did lay claim to certain tracts as its own on behalf of its subjects, this claim over territory was not the defining feature of its power. There are numerous instances available in mythology and oral records to show that the seat of a clan deity shifted from one place to another, a substantiation of the argument and a record of the impermanence of the sites of residence of the clans. The Hill State was, on the other hand, a power based on the unambiguous control of territory. There was, due to the historically impermanent nature of the clan sites, no fixed clans (or populations) over whom the Hill State claimed domination. Those deities who were resident in the area controlled by a Hill State, would, depending on the power of the State, pay obedience to it. But this obedience of the clan deities and its subjects had two characteristics. First, it was almost always directed to the god of the royal family and second it did not imply any dilution of the authority of the deity over its subjects.

The fact that it was not a direct rule of the king over the population resident in his territory but rather was mediated through the relation between his patron god and the clan deity was a clear reflection of the vulnerability of the State and its institutions in the period before

the coming of the British. It also functioned as an additional constraint on the emergence of a unified political authority in the region. It is now possible to understand the nature of the revenue and labour demands on the peasantry that were made by the deity and the Hill State. This was not based on the peasants ownership of land nor even on his ability to produce and harness various use values, but was based on his belonging to the clan or brotherhood which had certain obligations towards its protectors and patron, the clan deity, and towards the overlord of this deity. It was for this reason that the rulers of the Hill States were almost always either personifications of some divinity or its regent on earth, leading Emerson to designate the nature of their rule as 'the divine kingship'.

The relation of the pastoral communities and the agricultural communities to the Hill State with relation to the migration of the herds, the rights on grazing 'runs' and the duties payable to the State were quite different. The pastoral groups converted a large part of their wool and livestock into cash in the various markets in the foothills and those on the Himalayan trade routes.⁸⁶ Thus, most of the taxes that these nomadic pastoralists paid to the Hill State were in cash.⁸⁷ Their dues were collected as part of their general obligation to the State and were not dependent on the movement of the herds. The point of collection was either the customs post at the borders of the State or at the fairs and markets where the pastoralists gathered to trade and exchange. These were often also the nodal points within their seasonal movements. Payment in kind was usually made to the peasant community or its reigning deity. This was for the use during their seasonal migrations of harvested fields and grazing commons over which the peasants or their deity claimed as their own.⁸⁸

All this discussion must not blind one to the emergence of certain non-divine or secular bases for the king's power and of institution which reflected this. The bigger Hill States had distinct offices for the collection of revenue, they had small standing armies distinct from

86. Barnes, *Memorandum*, op.cit., pg. 108; Kullu, 1897, op.cit., pp. 95–6; there is a good discussion on the nature of payments made to the Hill State by the pastoralists in Chetan Singh, op.cit., chapters 1, 4 and 6.

87. *Ibid.*, pg. 96.

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 92–4.

the levies of Begar that were raised during large conflicts, and they had control over social groups which were involved in activities other than agriculture. This gave them much greater independence from the pressures of the clans and their deities. The purpose of the above discussion has been to attempt an understanding of the nature of political authority in the Western Himalayas, the points of contradiction and the possibilities of overcoming these within the historical movement internal to its social formation. This discussion now has to move on to the terrain of social relations which will enable one to extend the discussion of this chapter and to flesh out the contradictions and complimentarities that have been noted here.

Processes and Institutions of Surplus Appropriation

Forms of Surplus Appropriation

The dismal amounts agriculture produced over and above the survival necessities of the community, and the need to maintain communal forms of labour to sustain agricultural productivity, meant that there was only very little that could be appropriated by the Hill State or other institutions of the ruling class. There were two consequences of this. The first was that institutions within the community of producers – the clan – emerged which were able to appropriate relatively large amounts of the available surplus, not only from agriculture, but from other economic activities as well. They were also able to appropriate a large amount of the labour of their constituents, without any coercion, mainly through activities, frequently religious, whose overt function was the social reproduction of the clan.⁸⁹ The other

89. The main institution for this appropriation within the community was the village or clan deity whose ceremonies and stores involved expenditure of large amounts of the collective resources and labour at periodic intervals throughout the year. The temple stores also functioned as a safety net for the community during years of bad harvest and other natural or social calamity. This feature of the clan deity and other community institutions has been discussed at length and with great competence by H.W. Emerson, op.cit., Chapters I, III, V, VI, X, XI and XII. Also see the discussions in H.A. Rose, *Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province*, Vol. I, (henceforth Rose, *Glossary*.)

consequence was that the Hill State, located outside the boundary of the clan remained that much weaker in relation to it.⁹⁰ Its inability to override the claim of the clan to a share of the surplus meant that a rival centre of power emerged and sustained itself, which, in association with the geographical factors, made it so much more difficult for the Hill State to consolidate its power. The clan deity and even the deity of the ruling family became institutions that extracted surplus and hoarded it.⁹¹

There were two main forms of appropriating the surplus produced in society, in kind and through labour. Much smaller amounts of the surplus were appropriated in the form of cash which the peasant families got from selling small amounts of cash crops and pastoral goods like poppy, hemp, tobacco, wool, blankets, etcetera and their labour to the traders who came up to the hills. The inability of agriculture to produce surplus enough for the requirements of a mature State has already been noted. What is of equal import is that there did emerge institutions, including the Hill State, which managed to appropriate such a relatively large surplus from so impoverished a region. This was made possible by, what modern economists would

90. H.W. Emerson, op.cit., chapters III and XI.

91. Barnes, *Memorandum*, op.cit., pg.112, 'At Surrahun in Bussahir, there is a temple of the national goddess, called Bheema Kallee. A large portion of the oil, wine, and corn received from the country is consumed in the daily sacrifices of the deity. A goat is killed on the average every day, and offered upon the shrine. Nothing is done by the Raja or Wuzeers without consulting the oracle of Surrahun, and whenever any compact is made, the members thereof are sworn to observance at the feet of Bheemakallee. The maintenance of this temple is more expensive than the cost of the Raja's own household. The idol is rich in ornaments and has a full treasury, supposed to contain about 40,000 rupees, while the Raja's own Exchequer at Rampoor is usually empty. On great occasions such as the birth of an heir, or the marriage of the Raja, treasure can be obtained from the temple; but for ordinary expenses, even for the discharge of the British tribute, the priests refuse to give up a single rupee.' It should be noted that at this time the annual cash collection in the revenue of the Bashahr State was sometimes as little as 17,480 rupees, while it averaged around 25,000 rupees. Rose, *Glossary*, op.cit., also contains references, too many to quote, to this function of the various gods of the Himalayas.

call, spreading the tax net very wide. The demands on the peasant family included, as a regular part of surplus appropriation, not only goods which were produced through agriculture and pastoral activities, but also various products gathered from the forests and direct labour of the peasants for public as well as domestic needs of the rulers. This indicates the usefulness of including domestic labour into the account of total social labour in the earlier discussion on forms of labour.

Appropriation of Goods

The following quote from Barnes 'Memorandum on the District of Bussahir...' gives a good description of the manner and range of goods that were collected by the Hill States in the form of revenue from their subjects.

The revenue of Bussahir is realised by eighteen different imposts or "Kurrads". The State has a distinct share in every department of industry, and is not above receiving its income in a little ghee, oil, corn, honey, wine (made from the juice of grapes), ingots of iron – where iron abounds, wool, as also contributions from the flocks and herds of the people. ...the cost of such [royal] festivals as the Ram-Nowmee, the Dussarah, and the Holee, is provided for, each by its separate money tax. The Raja's elephant has a cess specially imposed for its maintenance to which every peasant contributes at the rate of three annas a house. A similar impost exists for furnishing the Raja's magazine.⁹²

The above extract from the mid-nineteenth century gives a fair account of the nature of the revenues collected by the Hill State. Similar was the manner of paying the dues to the local deity and the royal temple. The bigger States, like Bushahr had separate officers for collecting the different dues and who maintained their own account.⁹³

92. G.C. Barnes, op.cit., pp. 109–10.

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 110, 121–22, 'Twenty Collectors, each supreme in his own department, harassed the peasant at irregular times for his instalments of oil, corn, honey, fruits, cash, &c., the produce of his fields, his flocks and his industry. The stores so collected were never brought to the general credit of the State, but expended at the discretion of each agent, to feed the Raja's elephant, the maintain the Raja's stables, to furnish his magazine, to purvey for his household, and to provide daily sacrifices for the national goddess Bheema-Kallee.'

For the British officials who carried out the Land Settlements, these were 'irrational' and wasteful. What they did not realise, and what is important to this discussion, is that these were more often than not a consequence of the power of the clans and other centres of political power below the Raja over which he had little control. On special occasions, like the royal festivals noted above, contributions were levied on the subjects in money, kind and labour.

Appropriation of Labour

Begar, or labour service, was an integral part of the demand on the peasant family by the Hill State and the local deity.⁹⁴ It is therefore proper to study it as a form of surplus extraction and revenue collection rather than merely as a form of labour. The low agricultural productivity and monetisation made Begar the predominant form of surplus appropriation in the region under study. The British administrators perceived Begar as an additional impost on the peasantry distinct from the general revenue and consequent on the nature of the mountainous terrain. They did not see it as a part of the revenue demand, which it was, but rather as an institution peculiarly suited for conscripting labour from the entire population to offset the

94. Lyall, op.cit., '... it appears that in the times of the Rajahs the landholders were divided into two classes, viz., 1st, those liable to military service; 2ndly, those liable to menial service.' G.C. Barnes, *Kangra Settlement Report*, 1850, (henceforth Barnes, 1850), '...a custom has grown up, possessing the sanction of great antiquity, that all classes who cultivate the soil, are bound to give up, as a condition of the tenure, a portion of their labour for the exigencies of Government. Under former dynasties, the people were regularly drafted and sent to work out their period of servitude, wherever the Government might please to appoint. So inveterate had the practice become that even artisans, and other classes unconnected with the soil, were obliged to devote a portion of their time to the public service. The people, by long prescription, have come to regard this obligation as one of the normal conditions of existence; and so long as it is kept within legitimate bounds, they are content to render this duty with cheerfulness and promptitude. Certain classes, such as the privileged Bramin and Rajpoot, uncontaminated by the plough, were always exempt, and the burden fell principally upon the strictly agricultural tribes.'

difficulty of paying for these services from the meagre revenue collections.⁹⁵ A careful look at the different types of Begar that were required from the peasantry, shows that there was no distinction recognised in the demands which were made in money, kind, labour or a combination of these depending on the circumstances. Begar was used, at times, as a generic term for the demands that were made on the peasantry.

There were basically two types of Begar that are classified in British records.⁹⁶ The first was called *Athwara* Begar and included the regular demands of labour.⁹⁷ These were portage, including carrying the revenue collected in kind to the ruler's household or the store of the deity, manning the *Chaukis* (police posts) along travel routes and defending the resources of the ruler or deity from encroachments by neighbouring powers, providing labour, food and other requirements for officials of the State and the deity, and service in the household of the ruler or the temple of the deity.⁹⁸ The second form of Begar listed

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- 95. Capt. D. Briggs, op.cit., pg.1; Barnes, 1850, op.cit., pg122, here he records that he ordered that every cultivator should be given a 'Poorzee' (slip of paper) detailing the State's revenue demand on him, and this 'Poorzee' did not include Begar dues but only that which had to be given in cash or kind.
 - 96. In some records the classification is on the basis of military service and menial service and in some documents the distinction is made on the basis of that labour which is demanded on a regular basis and that which is demanded on specific occasions like royal functions and official tours. This confusion in British records may be due to the fact that the first classification was made at the beginning of British rule, while the second classification comes to us from the twentieth century. The difference could also be due to the different river valleys from which this information was gathered. We shall deal mainly with the second form of classification of Begar since it includes military service too and makes the distinction on the nature of the demand and not merely on its outward form.
 - 97. PHSA, *Begar in the Simla Hill States*, 1939, op.cit, pg. 171; *Begar in the Punjab Hill States*, 1944, Bundle 19, No. 451, 'Policy Regarding Begar in Hill States/Estates', pp. 22–23. These sources date more than a century from the time we are discussing in this chapter, but have been used since they contain a wide selection of official records and information from the period discussed in this chapter.
 - 98. *Ibid.* Most people interviewed for this research have claimed that the labour and time given to their deities should not be included in the

in British records is called *Hela Begar*. This was the demand made on the subjects on specific occasions like birth, marriage, and death in the ruling family, or some special ceremony of the deity. This contribution included labour, goods and cash. The contributions for the royal festivals noted above would be included in this type of Begar.

It is difficult to unearth the precise content of Begar before the coming of the British since all the references are from their records. In their very first documents recording the conditions of the region – the Sanads they granted the hill states' rulers at the conclusion of the Anglo-Gurkha war of 1815–16 – the British made a distinction between labour demands and revenue demands within Begar.⁹⁹ It is from the inconsistencies in British documents in their definition of Begar that it is possible to reconstruct a notion of surplus demand, which encompassed a continuum of labour, its products and the cash value realised from both. The definition of *Hela Begar* is one clear example of this unified conception of demand that was made on the subjects of the Hill State and of the deity. It is also possible to substantiate this

category of Begar—an imposition by the Hill State—because it was done willingly. This distinction has not been accepted here for the following reasons. First, there are many references in the early British records to the willingness to contribute Begar labour as long as the demand was part of the traditional peasant rhythm. Second, the form and content of the labour to both the Hill State and the deity was very similar. Third, often little distinction could be made in the demands of the Raja and that of the 'national god'. What does merit attention is that there was greater peasant control over the labour and its product that was due to the deity, specially when it was given within the clan. But this does not change its character as an institution for appropriating the available surplus.

99. C.U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, Vol. IX, Calcutta, 1892, pp. 111–60, contains the details of all the obligations towards the Paramount Power by the Himalayan States. These included cash tribute in the case of the larger States but Begar was demanded of even the smallest of the Simla Hill States. The providing of 'Begaris' was usually the second condition in most of the treaties mentioned above. See also Capt. D. Briggs, op.cit., pp. 1–4; and also Fraser, op.cit., pp. 215, 271; the first Land Settlement in the region by Barnes too continued with this distinction between revenue demand and Begar demand, see Barnes, 1850, op.cit., pg. 228

understanding by oral sources like songs, legends and mythologies of the deities.¹⁰⁰ The absence of any terms to distinguish between demands for labour and for goods and money further strengthens the argument being advanced here.

Constraints on Accumulation of Surplus

It will be evident that this composition of the surplus that was appropriated, with direct labour and perishable items forming such a large part of it, imposed severe constraints on the possibility of accumulation. Unlike cash or other collections of non-perishable items, surplus in the form of labour, grass, ghee, oil, etcetera could not be stored for long periods. Large parts of the surplus thus appropriated had to be consumed within a relatively short historical time. No large stocks of cash or bullion were possible. In fact, the task of collecting these diverse products and services, instead of its money equivalent, reduced the actual amount that came into the hands of even those individuals who, at least in theory, commanded an area large enough for significant amounts of accumulation to be possible. A case in point of this would be the same Bushahr State, which we discussed before.¹⁰¹ There was a physical limit to the amount of perishable goods that could be consumed by the royal family and its retainers. The amounts that did come in the form of cash and durables like wool, cloth, iron implements, etcetera were used in paying for the various commodities and services that were not available locally and could thus not be taken in revenue, but were considered necessary for sustaining the living standards of the ruler. References to the elephant of the Raja of Bashahr has already been made. Most of the ruling families wore clothes made of silk and cotton which had to be imported from China and the Indian plains, and they used some armaments like small bore cannon and matchlocks for their army. This that no accumulation took place. There were significant amounts of accumulation in spite of all

100. The two main sources for this are Rose, *Glossary*, op.cit., pp. 304–6 among many others; and H.W. Emerson, op.cit., specially chapters IV, V, VI, X, XI.

101. As we have seen, even the greatest accumulation of cash in the treasury of Bheema-Kallee was only 40,000 rupees while the normal annual cash revenue was in the range of 25,000 rupees.

these constraints, specially in the larger Hill States like Bussahir, Kullu, Mandi and Chamba. The point that needs to be emphasised is that this accumulation was at a level much lower than in States of comparable territorial spread and resource base in other contexts, as has been shown in various British estimates of the total income, wealth, and ‘net worth’ of these States from the early period of their Paramountcy.¹⁰²

On the other hand, the temples, with their regular rituals and sacrifices, consumed a larger part of the perishable surplus. The deities did not have the same expenses as the ruler, apart from these ceremonies, and could thus save a larger part of their cash income and collections of durable commodities. Some of the larger temples and their deities accumulated massive amounts of coins, bullion and other valuable commodities. Labour could also have been accumulated in the form of buildings like temples and palaces, and other structures like bridges, roads for the trans-Himalayan trade, etcetera which could perhaps not be converted into money, but could very well add to the wealth, and power, of the appropriators. But the largest share of labour services taken was used for portage – carrying goods, persons and the revenue from village to village and valley to valley.¹⁰³ This inability to use the large amounts of direct labour available was due to, one, the low level of technological knowledge, and two, the ‘demographic’ constraints on the development of the forces of production that have been discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

There were attempts historically to unify the institutions and functions of the king with the temple and its deity to bring surplus appropriation under one roof. But it can hardly be said to be the dominant trend within the historical context being studied in this chapter.¹⁰⁴ The local deities and their temples remained robust

102. Barnes, *Memorandum*, op.cit., pp. 125–26; *History of the Punjab Hill States* (in manuscript), collected by William Coldstream from managers and other officials of the Hill States, MSS. EUR. No. D0706, OIOC.

103. Capt. D. Briggs, op.cit., pp. 3–4; Barnes, 1850, op.cit., pg. 228.

104. Mandi would be a good example of this. The Raja had abdicated in favour of his family god and ruled as his vice-regent. This theocratic nature of kingship was a common feature of the Himalayan areas but could not become an effective vehicle for consolidating the king’s power because there was not one but many contending divinities even in our

institutions replicating many of the powers and functions of the king and successfully defending their autonomy. Even in areas where the king was able to dominate the political power of the clans and their deities, as in Bushahr, Kullu and Chamba among others, this was done by subduing the clan deities to the royal god. This process of subduing clans through the medium of the royal deity had two inherent shortcomings in making the power of the king absolute. The first was that these royal gods themselves retained a large measure of autonomy vis-à-vis the king. It has been seen how the resources of Bhima Kali were outside the control of the Raja. Second, their domination of the clan gods was not at the expense of crushing and appropriating their local power, specially in secular matters, but by an admission of suzerainty on the part of the clan gods who paid tribute and visits to this royal god at regular intervals while retaining their hold over the affairs of the clan.¹⁰⁵

example given above. The ruler of Mandi was Madho Rao, an incarnation of Vishnu, but the most popular divinity was Shiva. Theological confusion does not stop there since on Shivratri, the most important festival, all the gods, goddesses and other divinities of Mandi came to the capital to pay homage to Madho Rao. What is noteworthy for our discussion is that all the lesser deities of Mandi paid homage to Madho Rao. This was not the case in other States, like in Bashahr where many deities kept themselves independent of Bhima Kali of Sarahan or in Keonthal State, where the ruler was the god incarnate but, again, was not the divine patriarch of all the people residing within the State. *Mandi State Gazetteer, 1920*, Lahore, 1922; pp. 61–4. This political subjugation of the population in the guise of religion was also apparent in Kullu, but it has not been included as an example here since there was not many sources on the history of Kullu before its conquest by the Sikhs and later the British when the Hill State was incorporated into British territories.

105. We shall discuss in a chapter later the interesting phenomenon of one group of gods called Mahasu overrunning the domain of all other divinities in the region of the Simla Hill States and Tehri-Garhwal in the second half of the last century and the early decades of this one. They carried on divine warfare without giving any quarters—destroying, killing, exiling or incorporating all the different autonomous deities of the region. We shall in particular discuss whether there were any links between the transformations in agriculture, and rural economies in general, with the coming of British land settlements and this phenomenon which helped eradicate many divisions within the peasantry and laid the

One way of overcoming the constraints on accumulation could have been to convert the goods, if not labour services, into money at the various trade fairs and other markets. This was not possible beyond a point since there was little monetisation in the region and thus there was no method of realising the value of the appropriated goods and services. It is true that there was a constant flow of cash into these mountain communities through the medium of trade. Some groups like the nomadic pastoralists and the agricultural villages along the main trade routes regularly converted a substantial part of their available resources into cash to pay the various demands of the Hill State, and for obtaining certain goods which were not available in the region. This has perhaps led historians and other observers of the Himalayas to speak of the monetisation, albeit modest, of these societies in the period before the coming of the British.¹⁰⁶ The argument of this book is that the existence of some cash does not provide evidence for monetisation of economic and social relations and that the economy of the region remained incapable of moving forward from the barter relations that characterised the exchange of goods.

The sole input for cash in the region was the trade, where some goods were exchanged for coins.¹⁰⁷ But this cannot be called money by any form of analysis since it did not function as a general equivalent for the goods at the market. There is ample evidence to show that these coins, obtained from the trade fairs and other markets, could be exchanged only for certain commodities and at prices fixed without relation to supply or demand.¹⁰⁸ The purpose of exchanging these specified goods for cash was to enable the seller to pay the State in cash dues wherever required. It could not be, and was not, used for accumulation by either the peasant family or many of the smaller

basis for the emergence of a single social and political identity. The main sources for this discussion and the point made in the main text above are Rose, *Glossary*; and H.W. Emerson, op.cit.

106. Again, the latest and most nuanced argument for this is provided by Chetan Singh, op.cit., pp. 177–79.
107. *Rampoor Fair*, op.cit., pp. 60–61; Barnes, *Memorandum*, op.cit., pp. 108–09.
108. *Ibid.*

Hill States and other surplus appropriating institutions. The goods at these markets and fairs could not also be called commodities since they were not produced for the purpose of realising their exchange value. Rather each good was produced to meet its use value, which in some cases would have been to furnish a part of the demands of the Hill State, which collected use values in the form of goods and the products of labour services.

The introduction of some cash into the trade relations did not alter the basic nature of the Himalayan trade, which continued to be based on barter. The introduction of cash only meant the deferment of the barter relation and not its substitution by money. If the wool of the pastoralists was to be exchanged for the cloth of the traders, the availability of coins meant that instead of immediately exchanging wool for cloth the second half of the exchange could be postponed for a later date. Not only this, the person conducting the second part of the exchange could also be different. Thus, rather than our pastoralist exchanging his wool for cloth and giving his dues to the Hill State in cloth, he could exchange the same wool for cash, pay the Hill State with that and the king could use this to procure cloth and other items of his want. The substantiation of this argument is to be found in the nature of the market and the restricted scope for the circulation of money.

There were definite directions for the cash flow in the trade fairs and markets that we have been discussing and money was not acceptable for every deal. But more importantly, the circulation of cash was restricted to these fairs and markets and did not change the nature of exchange in the local exchanges of resources between and among different pastoral and agricultural groups of the region that was so central to its political economy. The same goods that were traded for cash with the traders of the plains at specified times and locales could not be procured for much larger amounts of cash at any other time and place.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, it is our contention that perhaps it will be

109. Difficulties in obtaining supplies has been the general refrain in all British travelogues and other official documents of the nineteenth century. Raper, op.cit., pg. 477; 'The corn wanted for the troops and required of them (the villagers), but which they either declared their inability to supply, or about which they equivocated for days, was at last, on search,

unwise to speak of the monetisation, however modest, of the economic relations of the Himalayas before the coming of the British. For now it will be enough to state that there was no commodity production, however rudimentary, and no exchange value on the goods that were produced. Exchange of goods was on the basis of their use value and the little amounts of cash that were introduced functioned rather as tokens for the facilitation of barter that was well established.

This lack of monetisation made it so much more difficult for the unification of the secular powers of the king and the deity. The existence and exchange of different use values, as embodied in the different forms of production discussed above, without their unification through the development of exchange value and the general equivalent – money, meant that the conditions for transcending the contradiction between the king and the deity did not exist. This could only be achieved with the aid of some form of external intervention, which would either monetise economic relations or strengthen the relative power of either of the antagonist political institutions.

As one shall see, this protracted historical struggle, which defined the social formation of the early nineteenth century Western Himalayas, was decided in favour of the rulers of the Hill States due to the establishment of the British rule. This made the political position of the ruler unassailable and converted natural resources like forests into instantly cashable commodities under the sole ownership of the Hill State.

found in abundance in their houses, although the price fixed upon it by their own headman had been advanced for its purchase; '... we gave a rupee, which delighted her much, although she did not seem to be quite aware of its use.' Fraser, op.cit., pp. 174, 202, 237; 'The natives always exhibit an unwillingness to part with anything they possess, even at a price considerably beyond its value.' The Himalayan villagers are '... generally speaking, totally ignorant of commerce, and strangers to the use of money, refusing to part with their provisions for three times the value when tendered to them in rupees.' George Francis White, op.cit., pp. 52, 68, 98 Capt. Thomas Skinner, op.cit., pp. 224, 227; for an example of this lack of awareness about money in parts of Himalayas in the 1970s see Christina Noble, *At Home in the Himalayas*, London, 1991, pp. 104–05.

Structure of Lineage and Family

Clan and Lineage

Before a proper discussion on the structure of lineage and family it might be useful to make a note of the important features of social composition in the region. The population of the Western Himalayas consisted of three main groups of people. The largest of these were those who claimed affiliation to the *Khash*¹¹⁰, a tribe which is supposed to have been resident in these mountains before the Aryan language speakers came, and they still form the main body of the Himalayan peasantry. The second biggest group was of those who were collectively called the *Naga* tribes and consisted of agricultural labourers and other village menials situated in relations of subordination vis-à-vis the *Khash* peasantry and the Hill State.¹¹¹ The third group of people in the region were those who claimed descent from immigrants who had come to these mountains in historical times for protection from political and religious persecution and for trade activities¹¹². This last group included all the rulers of the Hill States and the priests of the orthodox Hindu temples.

The *Khash* accounted for between 50 to 75%, and at some places even more, of the population in different parts of the hills from the valley of the Ravi river to the hills of Kumaon¹¹³. They were divided into various clans, and sub-clans, on the basis of lineage and

110. *Bashahr*, 1910, pp. 20–21; *Kullu*, 1897, pg. 58; H.W. Emerson, op.cit., Chapter I, pg. 7.

111. *Census of India*, 1911, Vol. XV, Punjab, pp. 483–85.

112. *Bashahr*, 1910, pp. 18, 19; Jubbal, 1910, pg. 10; *Kullu*, 1897, pp. 59–60.

113. *Census of the Punjab*, 1881, op.cit., Exact percentages for the population of the *Khash* are difficult to work out because of mainly two interconnected reasons. One, the conceptual confusion among the different information gatherers within the British officialdom, and two, the rapidly changing identities and status claims in different regions of the Himalayas among the local populations. The *Khash* comprised mainly of those who were classified as *Kanet* (with a few minor exceptions), most of those who were classified as cultivating Rajputs, a majority of those classified as Brahmins, all those classified as *Bhats* and *Pujaris*, and some of the non-polluting professional and artisan groups.

territory¹¹⁴, both of which identities were expressed through the institutions of the village deity and the ‘general body’ of all the constitutive families – the *Khumri* which has been discussed earlier.¹¹⁵ Some of them styled themselves as Brahmins and the rest referred to themselves as Rajputs.¹¹⁶ In spite of this claim they all were agriculturists who worked the plough and did not follow any of the caste practices with respect to marriage customs and kin relations, physical pollution, ritual taboos, etc. which marked these castes in the rest of the subcontinent.¹¹⁷ As agriculturists they were referred to as *Kanets*, and this is the name they were assigned in almost all the British records. It must be kept in mind that the *Khash* and *Kanet* refer broadly to the same group of people, the first name being used for denoting

114. Bashahr, 1910, pp. 20–22, ‘... the Kanets are divided into innumerable sub-sections or *khels*. These take their names either from some famous ancestor, or from the place where the *khel* has settled. Apart from the *khels* are certain main divisions of the tribe (*Kanet* or *Khash*), which in spite of the modern tendency towards equality among all *Kanets* are still clearly traceable’.

‘In the first place there are two classes of *Kanets*, superior and inferior. ... Many of the *khels* of the first class trace their descent from the old *Máwis*, and it is said that they are still clearly distinguishable by the quarrelsome and unruly temperament of their members. Bashahr is reported to have 25 *máwi khels*, Jubbal 24, Keonthal 10, Kotkhai and Kumhársain 6 each, and most other states one or two. In Bashahr they are collectively known as *Khund Kanets*, and other *Kanets* as *Ghára Kanets*.’

The Gazetteer lists over the next two pages all the other divisions between the different clans of the *Khash*, their mythological origins and the nature of social and political relations between them. This information was also provided by Mohar Singh, in Simla, 1996.

115. H.W. Emerson, op.cit., contains the most detailed accounts of the structure, nature and functions of the village deities and the village councils. Specially see chapters III, VI, IX, X, XI and XII; Rose, *Glossary*, also contains many accounts of popular legends and myths which indicate the above contention.

116. Bashahr, 1910, op.cit., pg. 20; Kullu, 1897, op.cit., pg. 59; H.W. Emerson, op.cit., chapter I, pp. 6–7. This clear identification is evident only in the later British records.

117. Bashahr, 1910, op.cit., pp. 12–22; Kullu, 1897, op.cit., pp. 30–40, 54–6.

the tribal identity and the latter name being used for purposes of defining the landed peasantry.¹¹⁸

In considering the political organisation of the hills....., we must dismiss from our minds all ideas of fully organised principalities, and think of an order of things that was patriarchal rather than monarchical, and very much akin to the clan system of the Highlands of Scotland, down to the eighteenth century. When this organisation came into existence we cannot say; but its primitive character suggests the possibility of its having been the earliest form of government in force in the hills¹¹⁹.

The authors, the first modern historians of the Western Himalayas, go on to add that the earliest dependable written evidence about the political condition of the hills, from the writings of the 'Muhamadan historian' Ferishta, records memories of a King of Kanauj subduing over 500 petty chiefs between Kumaon and Jammu in the region of the Siwalik hills in the first century of the Christian era. In most parts of the Western Himalayas the power of the clans was superseded by the authority of the Hill State, which had established itself as an institution by the end of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. This, however, did not destroy the power of the clan or its legitimacy. Emerson reports that even in the second decade of the twentieth century, 'the descendants of the pre-Rajput rulers of the present are still given pride of place in the congregation of the local gods and have a special relation to him, even though *they might have lost all secular power for generations*'¹²⁰.

The clan was the main social and political organisation of the region and was essentially a patrilineal exogamous kin group. It was known by various names in different tracts of the Western Himalayas,

118. Most of the British records do not follow a single pattern of ethnic classification for the region, and thus it can become extremely confusing for someone who encounters these haphazard identity labels in the archival records. I am grateful to Mohar Singh for bringing to my notice the nature of identity and the methods of classifying followed and have found that this method reduced the confusion of identity labels to a great extent.

119. J. Hutchison and J. Ph. Vogel, op.cit, pg. 12.

120. H. W. Emerson, *Typescript of Unpublished Anthropological Study of Mandi and Bushahr*, MSS.EUR 0321, Oriental and India Office Collection, British Library, Chapter XXI, pg.20, emphasis mine.

Thok in the Garhwal hills, *Aal* in the Chakrata and Sirmaur hills, *Khund* in large parts of the Simla hills, etc. In spite of this there was a very high degree of similarity in the structure and functions of these clans. It was divided into sub-clans which were composed of a few families ‘...the members of which are united by blood relationship and affection, whereas the *aal* (clan) is a bigger unit and a part of the village community, which is more concerned with the local authority of law and order’¹²¹. These clans were organised into larger units, which included other clans, to form a brotherhood – *bhaichara* – extending over a substantial population and territory. All these brotherhoods identified themselves as parts of the *Khash* and thus of equal status and worth, irrespective of local contexts of power and wealth.

The two organising principles of the clans of the Western Himalayas were lineage and territory. A lineage was composed of all the male progeny of a real or mythic ancestor, along with their dependants, organised in the form of a ‘polyandrous’ family. Every hill child was born with his identity of family, village and lineage. A village was usually composed of a few lineages, often with one of them dominating the others through control over some essential resource. Some villages contained only one lineage and no clan extended beyond a handful of neighbouring villages, usually within the confines of a single valley. The territory over which was spread the resource base of the villages, which comprised the lineage, formed the territory to which the lineage had special claims and was often known by the name of the lineage or its deity or by some important event in the history of the lineage in that part. Thus, identification with a certain lineage meant that a person was identified with not only a lineage but also a territory. All the natural resources of the territory were controlled by the lineage and no other person or lineage could use it or lay any sort of claim on it without the express permission of the lineage to which it belonged. The control of land, pastures or other natural resources by individual families was always on the basis of their affiliation to the lineage and was not a personal control on that resource.

The basic unit of the clans and the sub-clans was the polyandrous family composed of all the brothers, their widowed mothers, wives,

121. D.N. Majumdar, *Himalayan Polyandry*, Bombay, 1962, pg.90.

sons, daughter-in-laws, and unmarried daughters. This family was partilocal, patrilineal, patronymic and patriarchal. The eldest living male of the senior most generation was the head of the family and he represented the family in the sub-clan and clan *Khumris*. He was also known as the *Seana* of the family. He had to oversee the family economy in consultation and co-operation with other brothers and adult sons. The *Khumri* was in reality the assembly of these family representatives within the community. The head of this *Khumri*, as of all the *Khumris* at every level, was also known as the *Seana*, *Mawana* or *Ruhud*.

The Himalayan Family¹²²

From the very first accounts of the social formation of the Western Himalayas the oddity of marriage forms and inter-sexual relations have been highlighted. The existence of what is labelled 'fraternal polyandry' is widely reported from various areas of the mountains, but many writers also claim that this form of family is limited to certain pockets of the region and is not a generalisable feature.¹²³ What is generally accepted is the existence of bride price in marriage and the easy recourse to divorce by both the spouses. Much attention is paid to the consequences of easy divorce for property and parentage. These marriage forms have variously been seen as a result of the laxity of morals, of the primitiveness of scattered populations isolated from the great civilisations of the Indo-Gangetic plains, as some exotic ethnographic specimen, as an example of the needs of human institutions to adapt to the exigencies of geography, and as a result of the extremely skewed sex ratio of the population.

The general framework of reference for understanding the nature of the Himalayan family has been the monogamous family structure of the plains.¹²⁴ Thus, the different forms of marriage in the mountains

122. The polygynandrous family was described by the descendent of the Lambardar of Shillai village, district Sirmaur as a heritage of the Pandavas', June, 1996.

123. For example the writings of Y.S. Parmar, *Polyandry in the Himalayas*, Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore, Kanpur, 1975; D.N.Majumdar, *op. Cit.*; Gerald D. Berreman, *Hindus of the Himalayas*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963.

124. With exceptions like L.D. Joshi, *Tribal People of the Himalayas: A Study of the Khasas*, [reprint] Delhi, 1984. This book is the result of work done for

are categorised according to the ratio of husbands to wives and the nature of 'sharing' of the spouses. This has led to the discovery of approximately four different types of families within the same community – polyandrous, polygynandrous, monogamous and bigamous – which otherwise follows identical rules of social conduct, interactions and even inter-marry.¹²⁵ The following paragraphs discuss the relevance of the existing frameworks and explore alternative ways of understanding the Himalayan family.

For a proper understanding of the institution of marriage in this region it is important, methodologically, to avoid any prior reference to monogamous relations as normative, as this has misled many observers, as we see below, to quick value judgements by standards alien to the context.

The first references to the unique form of the Himalayan family came from the writings Fraser and other early British travellers in the region. Fraser called it '...a most disgusting usage, which is universal over the country.'¹²⁶ He goes on to recount the features of the normal Himalayan marriage which included the cohabitation of the brothers with the same wife, the 'purchase' of the wife from her parents, the

the degree of Doctor of Law on the subject of the *Khash* Family Law as it was found in the mountains of the United Provinces in the 1920s. A typical note on Himalayan marriage is, for example, in *Gazetteer of the Kangra District, Part III Lahul, 1897*, Lahore, 1899, [reprinted Delhi, 1994], pg. 13: 'Monogamy is the general rule, but it is not uncommon for a rich landowner to have more wives than one. Polyandry or the taking to wife of one woman by several brothers, is a recognized institution, and is very general; the object is to prevent the division of estates'.

125. Y.S. Parmar, op. Cit., identifies three forms of polyandry apart from monogamy and bigamy which are prevalent in Himachal Pradesh, pp. 52–3, 57–8; D.N. Majumdar, op. Cit., classifies them as Polygynandrous, Polyandrous, Polygynous, Monogamous, pg. 78; Berreman, op. Cit., too does a similar classification, and also includes Endogamy and Exogamy as categories into the already crowded field, pp. 150–8. While these may be useful in understanding varied aspects of the internal working of the marriage form and thus should not be criticised in themselves, it is evident that they are being used to identify and measure the deviation from monogamous relations which are taken as the natural reference.
126. Fraser, op.cit., pg. 206.

prevalence of divorce, the lack of concepts of chastity and female virtue and the importance of the wife to the family labour and economy.¹²⁷ This account also records the lack of jealousy and bitterness in both sexual relations and property matters between the husbands, the wives and the children, but this does little to ameliorate his stinging moral strictures against it. His account remains one of the most comprehensive on this subject and has laid the foundation for most of the later understanding, and also for the different theories that were propounded to explain its origin and continuance. The main parameters of the skewed sex ratio theory for polyandry's origin and continuance are given and explored by him. This later became one of the most popular explanations, specially among the locally emergent political leadership and intelligentsia.¹²⁸

Later works, which discuss the nature of Himalayan marriage, include the ecological and economic reasons in the list of causes. The main argument went that with the difficulty of obtaining subsistence and the need for maintaining the unity of the family, it became necessary for the brothers to marry together so as to concentrate labour and reduce the number of children. In these explanations the overriding necessity of avoiding the partition of landed property and other resources became central to understanding the evolution of such

127. *Ibid.*, pp. 206–8, 335–6. These pages are reproduced as an Appendix to this chapter.

128. The most thorough and influential study which foregrounds a skewed sex ratio as the primary explanatory cause of the origin and continuance of polyandry is Y.S. Parmar, *Polyandry in the Himalayas*, Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore, Kanpur, 1975. Parmar was a prominent leader of the Praja Mandal movement during the last years of the British rule and later went on to become the first Chief Minister of the new state of Himachal Pradesh in 1971. This book is a slightly altered version of his Ph.D. which he completed under the supervision of Prof. D.N. Majumdar whose book *Himalayan Polyandry*, has been referred to earlier, but unfortunately it contains no footnote references and seems to rely heavily on personal experience, which compensates for this lack. L.D. Joshi, op.cit., too gives some importance to the argument about sex ratio determining the origin of polyandry (pg. 93) even though his main argument revolves around the issues of property division and the need to concentrate human effort to enable sustenance in inhospitable regions.

marriage forms.¹²⁹ Often the excuse of geographical isolation from civilisation also became part of an apology for the persistence of such practices among otherwise noble people. Arguments based on the cultural and religious peculiarities of the local population too were advanced to explain this social phenomenon. Most of these have been based on a fair amount of direct evidence and experience of the institution of marriage as it prevails in the Himalayas, and thus provide useful material to attempt a different understanding of the whole issue.

The first thing that needs to be emphasised about the Himalayan marriage is that it is not a sacral rite but rather a secular contract.¹³⁰ Unlike in the Hindu Family law or *Mitakshara*, where religious rites are central to the validity of marriage, no such requirements bind the marriage in the Western Himalayas, though sometimes a few religious rites are also followed. The only requirement for establishing the validity of a marriage is the social sanction of the community which is acquired through institutions like public feasts, the payment of bride price and the involvement of various family and lineage elders in the arrangement and consecration of the marriage. Social sanction is also not entirely dependent on these factors; long cohabitation is also accepted as good as a valid marriage and the consequent children accepted as legal heirs by the community for purposes of inheritance. Not only is the nature of the marriage contract secular, but also in the final analysis, it is dependent only on the reality of actual cohabitation. If that is absent the marriage is deemed dissolved.¹³¹ The only aspect,

129. M.K. Raha & P.C. Coomar (eds.), *Polyandry in India: Demographic, Economic, Social, Religious and Psychological Concomitants of Plural Marriages in Women*, Delhi, 1987. See J.H. Crook, 'Polyandry in Ladakh' pp. 25–53, T.K. Ghosh, 'Persistence of Lahaul Polyandry and Decline' pp. 54–61, M.K. Raha & P.C. Coomar, 'Polyandry in a High Himalayan Society: Persistence and Change' pp. 62–129, R. Chandra, 'Polyandry in the North-Western Himalayas: Some Changing Trends' pp. 130–154.

130. This point is most cogently argued by L.D. Joshi, op. cit., pp. 60, 123, 316–7. See Bashahr, 1910, pg. 13 for evidence of religious rites creeping into the local marriage customs in the form of Ganesh puja, though this is still not mandatory for a proper marriage.

131. Even in cultures which follow the Hindu *Mitakshara* code, there may be many communities which do not strictly abide by it. These usually are

which seems to have universal, though not legal, validity for the successful acceptance of the marriage, is the payment of bride price.

Fraser quotes the bride price as averaging between 10 to 20 rupees at the time of the British conquest among the ordinary peasant families¹³². It seems that this was also quite a high price in the context of a cash-less economy since there are frequent references, even in the 1920s, to prospective grooms who 'labour for the family of the bride, as Jacob served for Rachel, for a time mutually agreed upon, and sometimes for as long as ten years.'¹³³ This bride price was central to the marriage tie, even though a marriage would be accepted as legal if it was not paid but the partners stayed and laboured in the same house.¹³⁴ The protection of this bride price for the husband(s), was all that was guaranteed under the family law of the Himalayan people. Marriage, being a secular contract, was easily dissolvable by mutual consent or even by unilateral action by one of the parties. Divorce was not socially discouraged and many references are found to the fact that it was usual for women to shift husbands for reasons like lower demands of agricultural labour, higher status among wives, richer family, and individual attraction, among many others. The normal course in such situations was for the husband(s) to demand compensation for bride price from the new family of the woman, often with a fine for depriving the former of a useful agricultural hand

from the marginal and dispossessed castes, while the dominant castes, follow the orthodox Hindu code. Moreover, the legal validity of a marriage, with its consequences for inheritance and status, is dependent solely on following the *Mitakshara* code. This is not so in the Himalayas, where an overwhelming majority of the dominant sections, who later formed the bulk of the Brahmin and Rajput populations, followed the marriage practices detailed above.

132. Fraser, op.cit., pg. 207. Bride price is quoted at Rs. 30 to 40 in 1869 in Kullu, A.F.P. Harcourt, *The Himalayan Districts of Kooloo, Lahoul and Spiti*, [reprint] Delhi, 1972, pg. 90, it is Rs. 70 in Simla district in 1880s, *Simla, 1888–89*, pg. 37, and this bride price is quoted at Rs. 140 in one case in Sirmur in the 1920s, *Sirmur, 1934*, pg. 61.
133. Emerson, op.cit., Chapter II, pg. 6.
134. This often happened when the woman was 'kidnapped' by or 'eloped' with her future husband(s), but this practice was more common in the trans-Himalayan regions of Kinnaur, Lahaul and Spiti. See among others, A.F.P. Harcourt, op.cit., pg. 92; Bashahr, 1910, pg. 16.

without notice.¹³⁵ This compensation for divorce is called *Reet* and has often been confused as the name of the Himalayan marriage.

Paternity in such a situation is not, rather cannot be, as strictly determined as in situations of monogamous marriage.¹³⁶ The general rule was that the children belonged to the husband(s) with whom the woman lived at the time of birth, though again there was no binding legal position on this, leading to many contentious judicial cases in the British courts when this family form started disintegrating in later years. Sometimes the rule was that if within ten months of divorce a child was born, she/he would belong to the ex-husband(s), but often 'the principle followed is embodied in the rule that, if a man has paid for the field, he is entitled to the produce.'¹³⁷ In any case, chastity is not a relevant concept for any understanding of the marriage form being discussed. What was important was that the children belonged to the husband(s) and marital residence was patrilocal.¹³⁸ Property and membership of the political community was based on the relation of fathers and sons, mothers and daughters being out of the reckoning. But even within this marriage structure it is possible to identify preceding forms of resource control, inheritance and marital residence, which for want of a better word, can be labelled matriarchal (with the emphasis remaining on *matri* rather than on *archal*).

135. Sirmur, 1934, pg. 61; Simla, 1888–89, pg. 37.

136. '...husbands sometimes cast lots for the children. But usually all the husbands are recognised as the fathers of each child,' Bashahr, 1910, pg. 16.

137. Emerson, op.cit., Chapter II, pg. 4. A quote which tells us as much about the writer as the people he writes about.

138. There were exceptions where a widow would be allowed to maintain her 'life interest' in her husband(s') property but may also be allowed to keep a man as a full time companion. Her sons from the deceased husband(s) would have the normal claim to their fathers' estate, but her children from this second companion would only be considered for inheritance from their father's estate. See L.D. Joshi, op. Cit., pp. 90–103 for an exhaustive discussion on the contemporary practice in Garhwal and Kumaon, and the legal position of such alliances within *Khash* Family Law, Hindu Law and the British courts, with examples of certain cases which came up for adjudication.

The clearest evidence of this is found in the *Sautia-Bant* form of division of property among the heirs.¹³⁹ The property was divided equally between the wives, resulting in unequal division between children. Two sons of wife-one will get as much as four sons of wife-two and this implied an unequal share to the children. In a social structure where equality of kinsmen was an important value, the persistence of this custom indicated perhaps the existence of conditions where the family was matrilocal and property inheritance was therefore matrilineal. This contention is strengthened by the parallel persistence of bride price, a significant part of which was often paid to the woman's maternal uncle, and the lack of patriarchal control over the wife's sexuality, both of which indicate a much stronger political position of the woman inside the family than would be warranted by the patrilocal, patrilineal, patrinytic and patriarchal structure that is in evidence at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The fact that marriage, family and property control were historically evolving is further evident from the slow disappearance of *Sautia-Bant* during the period of the British rule and its substitution by equal division of property among all sons and the growing irrelevance of the mother to the claim on property.

It is also interesting to note that marriages with multiple spouses had become uncommon in most parts of the Western Himalayas by the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁰ But clear indications of its wider prevalence, and thus a substantiation of Fraser's contention about its universality, can be found in two instances. One, the acceptance of levirate in the entire region comprising the mountainous territories of Punjab and the United Provinces. Two, the easy dissolution of marriage by payment of *Reet* money, which became a means for the basis for sale of hill women to people from the plains and for the exaction of added revenue for the Hill States.¹⁴¹ Both these customs indicate the special relation of the husband's brother to the wife and also denote the existence of secular contract as the legal notion of

139. The discussion in this paragraph is based mainly on L.D. Joshi, op. Cit., pp. 62–5. Additional information about this is also available in Bashahr, 1910, pg. 17, which calls this division of property *per stripes*.

140. Simla, 1888–89, pp. 36–7; Kullu, 1897, pp. 36–9; Sirmur, 1934, pp. 58–63; L.D. Joshi, op.cit., Chapter 2, pp. 59–110.

141. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

marriage. Rather than looking at these as discrete phenomenon within the Himalayan marriage, it is necessary to understand them as parts of a single marriage form at the time of the British conquest, which was disintegrating over the period of the study, being replaced by monogamous relations. Changes in the economic conditions, the strong ideological influences of orthodox Hinduism, the establishment of the British courts and the emerging social and political identities of the Himalayan people all contributed to this process.

The basic features of Himalayan marriage vis-à-vis the one found in the plains are listed in the table in the appendix.

Appendix

<i>Himalayan Polygynandrous Family</i>	<i>Hindu Monogamous Family</i>
1. Marriage is a secular transaction; wife is mostly purchased with bride-price.	1. Marriage is a sacrament; no bride-price.
2. No religious ceremony essential for legalising marriage.	2. Religious ceremony (Fire-Sacrifice) central component.
3. Existence of Levirate—the brother's widow is received as wife.	3. No custom of Levirate or widow marriage.
4. Marriage dissolvable by both partners with mutual consent; no set of 'socially acceptable reasons' necessary.	4. Marriage indissoluble; no concept of divorce recognised.
5. <i>Reet</i> (fine comprising original bride-price plus one rupee and goat) only requirement to legalise second marriage.	5. No such concept.
6. <i>Dhanti</i> marriage (marriage with a divorced woman) same status as first marriage.	6. No such concept.
7. No concept of chastity or adultery within the related lineages.	7. Strict control of woman's sexuality by husband.
8. Paternity dependant on mother's spouse during childbirth.	8. Paternity defined clearly.

CHAPTER THREE

The Foundations of British Rule: Hill State, Hill Station, Land Settlement and Monetisation

British Conquest of the Western Himalayas

The main causes for British engagement with, and final conquest of, the Western Himalayas need to be spelled out in some detail before it is possible to discuss either the nature or phases of British rule or the response to it by the local population. The generic causes of territorial conquest by the British East India Company can be understood and explained through the global context of colonialism based on the requirements of ascendant British capital, which first needed to monopolise trade and later the sources of raw material and captive markets for emergent industries. Any account of colonial conquests in one particular region needs to base itself on these in the first instance, otherwise it has a tendency to become a study of colonialism without perceiving colonialism. But equally important, for a comprehensive historical account, is the study of the specificities of the particular region. The nature and condition of local social and political structures, military strengths and strategies of the different players, the historical relation of this region with other areas both neighbouring and distant, the natural and economic resources of the region and many other such points need to be given attention. The following paragraphs shall attempt to study the region specific causes for the British conquest of the western Himalayas'.

Three broad concerns got the British interested in the region of the Western Himalayas. It was a major policy concern of the British in India both to curtail the power of the independent rulers and to extend their sway to the 'natural' limits of India as quickly as feasible.¹ They had little knowledge about the trans-Himalayan tracts apart from the fact that some form of Chinese, and possibly Russian influence existed there. This added to the British fear about their vulnerability along these 'natural' borders, which could eventually threaten their Indian possessions. They also wanted military and political control of the entire border with the Sikh territories as far as practicable, in order to curtail the possibility of the Sikhs expanding their power in the mountain territories, east of Sutlej, and thus flanking the British territories of Doab and Delhi.²

1. See Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India*, Delhi, 1989, pg. 250: 'There was nothing now, [James Mill] declared [in his evidence before the Parliamentary Committee of 1832], between the British and the most desirable frontier but the territory of Ranjit Singh'.
2. Foreign Department, Secret Branch, National Archives of India (henceforth NAI), 21st Dec. 1840, No. 36, 18th Jan. 1841, Nos. 56–64, 25th Jan. 1841, Nos. 90–92, 22nd March 1841, No. 53, 31st May 1841, Nos. 101–103, 12th July 1841, Nos. 80–81, 6th Sept. 1841, Nos. 42–44, 27th Sept. 1841, Nos. 42–45, 25th Oct. 1841, Nos. 22–29, 22nd Nov. 1841, Nos. 22–26, 20th Dec. 1841, Nos. 40–41. The years 1840–42 were tense years since Zorawar Singh had overrun the territories of Ladakh and removed the Tibetan authorities from Garo. He was making attempts at capturing Lhasa but was not able to consolidate his victory over the Tibetan-Chinese army since his supply lines were getting stretched during winter. He had also captured Lahul and Spiti and his armies had met with those that were holding Kullu for the Khalsa. There were reports that the border of Bashahr was being threatened and some minor scraps between the Sikh army and the residents and traders of the Bashahr borders had made the Rampur authorities nervous. Lt. Cunningham was deputed to camp at the border of Bashahr and proceed on to Garo to meet the legitimate Tibetan authorities, while at the same time dissuading Zorawar Singh from attacking Chinese dominions and from monopolising the trans-Himalayan trade. Lt. Cunningham's dispatches indicate that the British were extremely nervous about the possibility of the Sikh army under Zorawar Singh overrunning the British dominions in the Western Himalayas and also the effect of his attacks on Chinese territories on Sino-British relations at a time when the British were still to dominate the Manchu court.

The Sikhs were also using their control of the Sutlej valley and other trade routes through Kashmir to divert most of the trans-Himalayan trade of Punjab and Delhi to their own territories.³ The British wanted to control and have direct access to this trans-Himalayan trade.⁴ There were reports about the trade in woollen products and other commodities that linked the regions under their control with Chinese and Central Asian territories. The desire to control this trade for larger strategic reasons, and also profit from it, was the second important reason for their intervention in the Western Himalayas. The rule of the Gurkhas of Nepal, though limited to the mountainous areas, extended from present day Darjeeling till the Sutlej river and contained three of the most important trade routes, and all the sources of the rivers watering the plains of North India. The British policy was to curtail the power of the Gurkhas especially in the regions that they had conquered at the beginning of the nineteenth century, namely the territory between the river Kali and the Sutlej, and over which their control was still tenuous.⁵ The immediate causes of the war of 1814–15 between the British and the Gurkhas were some border disputes between the latter and some Indian States under British Paramountcy.

After 1803, when the control of the Delhi territories was firmly vested in British hands, there developed an interest in the regions beyond. Some British travellers had gone into the Himalayan regions

3. The most detailed description of this is available in W. Moorcroft and G. Trebeck, *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces of Hindustan and the Panjab; in Ladakh and Kashmir; in Peshawur, Kabool, Kunduz and Bokhra; 1819 to 1825*, Calcutta and London, 1858, pp. 45–7, Chapter III. See also Foreign Department, Secret Branch, NAI, 6th Sept. 1841, Nos. 42–44, 22nd June 1842, No. 36, and 7th Sept. 1842, Nos. 27–30. Pamela Kanwar, *Imperial Simla*, Delhi, 1990, pp. 13–14, also makes the same point.

4. James Baillie Fraser, *Journal of a Tour through Part of the Snowy Ranges of the Himala Mountains and to the Sources of the Rivers Jumna and Ganges*, London, 1820, (reprinted Delhi, 1982), pp. 275–77; This point is also discussed by Mohan Singh Rathore in the second chapter of his Ph.D. thesis, *Nineteenth Century Cis-Sutlej Hill States: Economy and Society*, H.P. University, 1987.

5. Udhab Singh, *Gurkha Conquest of Arki*, Lahore, 1902; also see John Pemble, *The Invasion of Nepal*, London, 1976.

and Punjab prior to this and had made available the first accounts of these regions. In 1808, the British organised the first official expedition to gather information about the mountainous territories under Gurkha administration. This expedition was sponsored by the Asiatic Society of Bengal and was ostensibly meant to explore the areas watered by the river Ganges. A reading of the published report indicates that it was to gather information about the region's economy – specially the trade with the Chinese provinces – its socio-political condition and the nature of Gurkha administration. The report of this survey contains detailed references to the internal administration of the Gurkhas in this region, the nature of agricultural production, natural resources and physical conditions. This was also a journey of discovery for the British in the expedition who found, to their unending delight, a European vegetation and climate in the mountains.

During the operations of the war against the Gurkha army, Captain Fraser was instructed by the British government to collect information about the regions through which he would pass, with special reference to its geography, the natural and human productions, political condition and any other information about the people which would be of use to the government or interest to men of letters. The report of the Ganges survey of 1808 and Fraser's reports form the first comprehensive account of the region's history, economy and ecology that became available to the British and provided the foundation for initial policy formulations.

In 1818 a survey of the Sutlej river to explore the possibility of trade across the Himalayas through this passage into Tibet and thence to China and Russia and the condition of these regions was commissioned.⁶ The possibility of transporting an army into these regions through this route was also an important concern at this stage. At the same time the British government financed two Britishers – Moorcroft and Trebeck – as private merchants, to proceed along trade

6. Capt. J.D. Herbert, 'An Account of a Tour made to lay down the Course and Levels of the river Setlej or Satudra, as far as traceable within the limits of the British Authority, performed in 1819', *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XVIII(1), 1829, pp. 227–58; also see Lt. A. Gerard, 'Narrative of a Journey from Soobathoo to Shipke, in Chinese Tartary', *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, No. 41 (New Series), pp. 363–91.

routes in and through the Himalayas wherever they led them.⁷ They sent regular reports of their findings to the Court of Directors of the East India Company in Calcutta and excerpts of this have been published later as a travelogue.⁸ From these various activities, both prior to the conquest and after, it seems that securing British India's 'natural' border and strategic concerns of controlling the trade to Central Asia and China took precedence over a proper settlement of administrative and revenue matters of the Himalayan regions. This seems to be a good indication of the priorities that animated British policy in this early phase.

Phases of British rule

The first or early phase begins in 1815 with the conclusion of the Anglo-Gurkha war which extended the conquests of the British East India Company into this mountainous territory. This phase ends in the late 1850s and early 1860s, by which time the three main influences of British rule – land settlement, forest settlement and the summer capital of the empire, Simla – were firmly in place. The years 1858–9 saw the pacification of the first major rebellion against British land

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7. William Moorcroft initiated his Himalayan quests before the British conquest of the region when he attempted to cross the Niti Pass and gather information about the trade of the trans-Himalayan tracts. He identified the Mansarovar Lake as the possible source of the Indus and also the Sutlej and another river named Sanpo, which was not yet identified with the Bramhaputra. He also made a record of information available about the different towns, markets and administrative centres of the trans-Himalayan regions, the halting stages, the availability of supplies for traders and for armies, and the commodities traded and the nature of Chinese authority over these areas. It was obvious from his account that it would not be possible to have a profitable trade with or effective military control over these regions if better access than that provided by the snow bound high passes of the Himalayas could not be found. But the scanty information reported by him and others led the British to intensify their efforts to find other routes for communication and trade with these regions and this effort mostly centred on the Sutlej valley and the route through Kullu onto Ladakh. The information collected by Moorcroft alone consists of fifty volumes of personal papers.
 8. W. Moorcroft and G. Trebeck, op. cit.

revenue administration in Bashahr state⁹ and 1861 saw the beginning of the first extensive survey and mapping of the forests of the Punjab Himalayas stretching from the Yamuna river to the border of the North West Frontier Province.¹⁰ In 1865 Simla was officially declared the summer residence of the Viceroy of the British Crown in India.¹¹ These three events inaugurated the second or middle phase of British rule in the Western Himalayas and themselves became the main processes of transformation in the region. British rule came into its own in this period stabilising an entire pattern of official knowledge about and policies for this region based on a benign paternalism over ‘noble savages’.

Under the monopoly of the British India government the ‘unrivalled wealth of the region’s timber’ became the single most important resource both in terms of monetary value and strategic importance. Private speculators had commenced timber operations from at least the 1830s in the Punjab Hill States along the banks of the big rivers¹², but it was another three decades before the first forest survey was commissioned and forest settlements were carried out by the government. In the decades of 1860s and 1870s a proper forest administration was put in place and had taken monopoly control of the forests from the local Hill States.¹³ The 1860s and 1870s were also periods when there were detailed land settlements carried out¹⁴, and

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- 9. A detailed account of the causes, spread, demands and aftermath of this rebellion is available in G.C. Barnes, *Memorandum on the District of Bussahir; and the Pacification of the Disaffected Portion of its Inhabitants*, Selections from the Records of the Punjab Government, Vol. V, No. 4, 1859–60, OIOC.
 - 10. The results of this survey are printed in H. Cleghorn, *Report upon the Forests of the Punjab and the Western Himalaya*, Roorkee, 1864.
 - 11. The best sources for the study of the origin and evolution of Simla are E.J. Buck, *Simla: Past and Present*, Simla, 1925, and Pamela Kanwar, op.cit.
 - 12. Barnes, op. Cit., pg. 127; Lt. George Francis White, *Views in India; chiefly among the Himalaya Mountains*, London and Paris, 1836, pg. 37; H. Cleghorn, op. Cit.,
 - 13. *Punjab States Gazetteer 1910, Bashahr State*, (henceforth *Bashahr 1910*), reprinted Delhi, 1995, pg. 55–6.
 - 14. The two most important land settlements were by G.C. Barnes, completed in 1850, and by J.B. Lyall, completed in 1872, for the British district of Kangra which included present day Kullu, Lahul, Spiti, as well as Kangra

a beginning was made in collecting local customs and rules and other information about the economy and demography of the region.¹⁵ It is at this time that one can observe a distinct change in official perception about the Western Himalayas. Specific policies and methods of administration were attempted as a result of the growing knowledge about the conditions of the Western Himalayas and a distinct ethnology can also be noticed. Expansion in the number and size of hill stations introduced a growing market for agricultural products and labour and opened up the isolated valleys to social influences from the plains.

By the 1930s and 1940s it is possible to discern major transformations in the character of the local economy, social relations and identities and in the self-conception of the hill people. British administrators and policy makers had increasingly to deal with a population which had not only been exposed to the intrusion of the market into their economy, but had also come to articulate political demands based on an acceptance of these new conditions. This was a period when the economic strains of the two world wars and the global economic depression were matched with a growing assertiveness of the hill peasantry demanding an overhauling of the political power and of social relations, specially with relation to property and ritual status. This process culminated in the formation of the Praja Mandals in the various Hill States of the Western Himalayas in 1939, which organised mass agitations on these demands. The benign paternalism which had characterised much of the earlier British attitude towards the hill peasantry slowly disappeared during this period, as they grappled with the increasingly strident, and organised, political and economic demands of the Praja Mandals. This can, therefore, be termed as the third or final phase of British rule in the Western Himalayas which culminated in the

proper. In the early 1850s Sham Lal also settled the land revenue of Bashahr state.

15. The census report of 1872 was prepared by D. Ibbetson, which contains reports of detailed surveys of Himalayan society. This he later published as *Panjab Castes*, Lahore, 1883. Much of the findings of this and the 1881 census were compiled and published by H.A. Rose, *Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of Punjab and the North West Frontier Province*, 3 Vols., Lahore, 1883.

formation of Himachal Pradesh in one part and the assimilation of the other part into the larger Uttar Pradesh during independence. This final phase also witnessed a radical reform of the social system in the entire region and a parallel overhaul of land relations empowering the proprietary peasants of Himachal Pradesh through little deeds in the land they tilled.

Stabilisation of British rule

The first reason for change of official policy and attitudes was the discovery that the importance of the region to commercial and strategic interests of the British Indian Empire had been grossly overestimated by the earlier accounts.¹⁶ Within a decade or two, it became evident to the British that though there existed a long tradition of vigorous trade through this region into the lands of Tibet, Yarkand and Central Asia, the volumes were not large enough to influence state policy.¹⁷ The difficult geography of the region and the sparse

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- 16. Capt. D. Briggs quotes William Moorcroft: 'The Thibetans have their flocks and herds in abundance, provided with wool of peculiar properties and admirably adapted for the finest manufactures. They have also some natural products of value – salt, borax, natron, and gold. They have no manufactures and rear an inadequate supply of food. The latter can be plentifully supplied from the British Provinces of India. Whether they shall be clothed with the broadcloth of Russia or of England; whether they shall be provided with domestic utensils of copper, iron, or pewter; with implements of iron and steel; with hardware of every description, from Petersburgh or Birmingham – is entirely in the decision of the Government of British India. At present there is little doubt to which the prize will be awarded, for enterprise and vigour mark the measures of Russia towards the natives of Central Asia, whilst ours are characterised by misplaced squeamishness and unnecessary timidity'. *Report on the Operations Connected with the Hindostan and Thibet Road, from 1850–55*, Selections from the Records of the Government of India (PWD), No. XVI, 1856, OIOC, pp. 7–8.
 - 17. This has been clearly stated in W. Coldstream, Personal Papers, OIOC, *History of Bussahir* (manuscript prepared by the Bashahr Wazeer),: 'When the country was first conquered it was supposed that commercial advantages might be derived from an ultimate connection with Bussahir, as opening a communication with the countries beyond the snowy mountains'.

production base meant that there was also not much scope for expanding these trade volumes. This was not the most convenient place to intervene in the trans-Himalayan regions. It was also discovered that no meaningful military expedition could be launched through this region due to its climate, topography and position of supplies. The second reason for change of official policy and attitudes was the final defeat of the Sikh military power in 1849 and the extension of British territorial control till the borders of Afghanistan. This opened up the route to Central Asia, Persia, and through Kashmir an alternate route to the trans-Himalayan regions. The economic and political importance of control over Punjab overshadowed the Himalayan acquisitions.

Parallel to the dwindling strategic importance of trans-Himalayan trade and communication through this region for British imperial interests was the growth of interest in the Himalayan timber. The emergent British towns of this period were entirely built with the local wood, mostly fir, pine and oak and the fuel requirements also were supplied from these trees.¹⁸ While the earliest British travellers had marvelled at the extensive forests of the finest timber,¹⁹ there was very little extraction of these for commercial uses outside the mountains in the first few decades because of difficulty of transport and lack of a developed market in the plains of north India. There is evidence that

The attention of Sir David Ochterlony was early directed to that object, and an intelligent native was deputed northwards to collect information, but nothing of importance has as yet resulted.

A settled government, fixed and moderate duties, and improved roads, may possibly hereafter induce the traders... to extend their journeys further south, to seek for the British staple at Jagadhri and Pattialah.'

18. Capt. D. Briggs, op. Cit., pg. 24: '... the Deodhar forests of Puttealah, Keunthal and Kotee chiefs within ten miles of Simlah, out of which have been built the Sanatoria of Dagshai, Kussowlee, Subathoo and Simlah...'; G.C. Barnes, op. Cit., pg. 127;
19. 'The pine trees increased in size, and were the tallest straightest and most magnificent I ever saw, and the forests covered immense tracts. What a seeming waste of noble timber! and how uselessly do these grand trees appear to flourish and decay.' J.B. Fraser, op. Cit., pg. 139; also quoted in Chetan Singh, *Natural Premises: Ecology and Peasant Life in the Western Himalaya 1800–1950*, Delhi, 1998, pg. 141.

some private entrepreneurs had begun commercial operation on a relatively small-scale. This extraction of timber was on a seasonal basis, with a handful of European merchants moving up the valleys of the big rivers like the Sutlej and Yamuna at the beginning of summer, paying the raja some money for the trees and then proceeding to cut and float as many down the river as was possible before the onset of winter.²⁰

It has been recorded in official documents that this private extraction was haphazard and ‘unscientific’ with more than 80 per cent of the trees that were felled failing to reach the depots in the plains in any useable shape.²¹ Another major complaint about these private merchants of timber was that they cut the trees indiscriminately, the young and old, without any regenerative plan, which would lead to the total decimation of this wealth over a few seasons.²² There was also no incentive for these merchants to invest in the forests’ regeneration since they had seasonal contracts with the local rulers and there common practice to cut many more trees than they had permission for.²³ A consequence of this realisation on the British government was that a comprehensive survey of the forests of the Punjab Himalayas was commissioned in 1861 and this was followed by the formation of a Forest Department under the Forest Act of

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- 20. A graphic account of the rapacious nature of these operations, and the waste they generated, is to be found in G.C. Barnes, *op. Cit.*, pp. 127–32; Lt. George Francis White, *op. Cit.*, pg. 37, writes about the wanton destruction of timber: ‘This might have been in some degree necessary in the first instance, for the purpose of building; but much havoc has been committed through the wasteful habits of travellers and their servants, in cutting down young trees for temporary huts, fuel, etc.; and, in great measure, with a wantonness characteristic of the Englishman abroad, many of the finest trees have been felled or blown up merely for the sake of amusement or occupation’.
 - 21. G.C. Barnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 129–30; H. Cleghorn, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–1, 36, 43.
 - 22. *Ibid.*, pg. 30: ‘Much of the finest timber, indeed, has been cut away in the more accessible places, and there is a want of system and mechanical appliances in the present mode of conducting operations. Unskilled persons are working for immediate profit, without regard for the young trees, or the future supply of timber’.
 - 23. *Ibid.*, pg. 34; G. C. Barnes, *op. cit.*, pg. 129.

1878.²⁴ This Forest Department instituted the ‘scientific’ management of forests, which were meant to maximise the timber yield without totally destroying the possibility of regeneration.²⁵ These developments were paralleled by forest settlements, which removed their control from the local communities and rulers and gave the responsibility for their management to the Forest Department.²⁶ These settlements also recorded in detail the respective rights of the villagers, the Hill State and the forest department, after classifying the forests into reserved, protected and open on the basis of the commercial importance of the trees.²⁷

During the military and civilian disturbances of 1857–58, the entire region of the Western Himalayas remained quiet, even though one or two small Hill states attempted to loosen British control over them or change their British imposed rulers. There was also some scare about the troops garrisoned in these mountains and Simla went through one severe scare related to the ‘intentions’ of the garrison stationed in the neighbouring cantonments of Kasauli and Jutogh.²⁸ Not only were these disturbances extremely minor in comparison with the goings on in the plains, many of them were mere rumours. What was more reassuring for the British was that there was no attempt among the local population to rebel. They also realised that the local population was small, scattered, and without any live contact with the political and social events of the plains.²⁹ Added to this was the advantage of

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24. *Gazetteer of the Kangra District, 1897, Part II, Kulu*, Lahore, 1899 (henceforth *Kullu 1897*), pg. 66.
 25. Ramchandra Guha discusses the nature of this ‘scientific forestry’ in the third chapter of his book *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, Delhi, 1989.
 26. *Kullu 1897*, pp. 65–67; In Bashahr State the forests were leased in 1864 for a fixed annual payment of Rs 10,000 and in 1877 the full control over these forests was given to the British government. *Bashahr 1910*, pp. 55–56.
 27. Ramchandra Guha, op. Cit.
 28. *Gazetteer of the Punjab Districts, Simla District 1888–89* Lahore, 1889, (reprinted Delhi, 1992), (henceforth *Simla District 1888–89*), pp. 29–30.
 29. For. Poll., 12th Nov. 1858, 266–270 and Keep Withs, File titled ‘Measures for discouragement of Periodic Panics in Simla’: ‘Simla was the safest place in India during the mutinies of 1857’ said William Hay, Simla’s

the topography, which would make it exceedingly difficult for any rebellious army of the plains to attack the British population of the mountains. The Western Himalayas were not only climatically, but also politically cool. The popularity of these Hill stations increased phenomenally, both among the officials and the non-official British in the aftermath of the revolt. This reinforced the growth of these settlements and many newer ones were built.

Political Economy of Hill Stations

Much of the contact between people of this region and the British during the early period was through the different travellers and army officers who went there to explore the area and administer the garrisons stationed in territories and forts under British administration. The climate and vegetation of the temperate areas of the Western Himalayas, glowingly recounted by these gentlemen, induced many Europeans to spend the summer months here to escape the heat of the plains of north India. This led to the growth of significant populations of Europeans in small pockets all over the region.³⁰ Soldiers were sent there to recuperate after strenuous campaigns. Many officers and some civilians too began to buy or lease land from the local rulers to build English style cottages where they spent the

Deputy Commissioner of that time. *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, New Edition, Vol. XXII, Oxford, 1908, pg. 379 wrote, 'Like all hill tribes, they [the Paharis near Simla] are a simple-minded, orderly people, quiet and peaceful in their pursuits and submissive to authority.' John Lawrence, under whose Viceroyalty the capital was shifted to Simla, listed the advantages of this town thus: 'This place of all Hill Stations seems to me the best for the Supreme Government. Here you are with one foot, I may say, in the Punjab, and another in the North-West Provinces. Here you are among a docile population, and yet, near enough to influence Oude'. From one who was part of the 'Punjab campaigns' and the military action during 1857–8, these words carried weight in London and helped in the decision to make this town the summer capital of British India. [some of these quotes are also printed in Pamela Kanwar, op. cit.]

30. In the Simla Hills itself there were about six European settlements which included Hill Stations, garrisons and sanatoria with a total population in excess of twenty two thousand, *Simla District 1888–89*, table XLIII.

summer months, often with their families.³¹ But it took time before these hill stations grew to any size.³²

The first permanent house built at the ridge which later would become the town of Simla came up only in 1822, when C.W. Kennedy, the political agent for the Cis-Sutlej Hill States found that it was becoming difficult to carry on government business from tents and at the same time provide accommodation to travellers who increased in number and rank with each summer.³³ By the forties of the 19th century there were more than a hundred European houses and some of them had residents all through the year thus laying the true foundation for a town. The first governor-general who came to Simla was Amherst,³⁴ while Auckland was the first to stay there for a considerable length of time during summer.³⁵ By this time there had emerged a small bazaar for the needs of the local population and some non-Europeans from the plains also began to follow their masters in their annual pilgrimage as service providers and shopkeepers.³⁶ By the end of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century towns like Simla were beginning to emerge as nodal points for the local economy, providing a market for the sale of agricultural products and labour services. These towns also provided the base from which British laws could be administered and the settlements of land and forest could be initiated.

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31. *Simla District 1888–8*, pg. 108: 'From 30 houses in 1830, it increased to upwards of 100 in 1841, 290 in 1866 and 1,141 in 1881.'
 32. *Ibid.*, pg. 110. Even in the 1880s the summer population of Simla, the largest of the Himalayan British towns was just above thirteen thousand.
 33. *Ibid.*, pg. 107.
 34. *Ibid.*
 35. Lord Auckland spent two continuous years in North India from 1837, to oversee the campaigns there, specially due to the concern about Afghanistan. Even though it was not considered an official shifting of the seat of government, he brought his secretary, advisors and office staff with him. During this period he stayed in Simla for much of the summer. For his stay a large house was constructed on an adjoining spur and it exists to this day. After him Ellenborough and Hardinge too paid similar visits to Simla. See Pamela Kanwar, op. Cit., pg. 26.
 36. Of the total population of 13,258 of Simla in 1881, 8,377 were classified as Hindus and a further 3,153 classified as Musalmans, *Simla District 1888–89*, table XLIII.

In spite of the emergence of these summer resorts/ hill stations/ sanatoria as markets for the local economy, their populations were mostly transitory, coming up into the mountains during the beginning of summer in the plains of north India and returning at the onset of winter in the mountains. Access to these summer stations in the Himalayas was difficult, since it involved the large logistical operation of conscripting thousands of Himalayan peasants as porters to carry baggage up the mountains and down again six months later.³⁷ No wheeled vehicles were possible, till the construction of the Hindustan-Tibet road in the 1850s, and often the mountain tracts did not even allow the passage of horses or other beasts of burden other than mules, ponies and the human labour mentioned earlier. For these reasons the hill stations remained a viable option only for the higher ranks of the British official establishment and its populations remained in the region of a few hundred Europeans and a few thousand Indians even in the height of summer. The effects on the local economy and society were still marginal due to this reason, even though their daily requirements of food and labour (spending power) and their ability to effect changes in local conditions (political power) was quite high.³⁸ The importance of these hill stations can be divided into two broad categories: (1) their economic and social impact on local conditions and their function as centres for administering British laws and (2) their effect on the local environment and transformation of its historical geography.

The most important economic and social effect of the establishment of these towns in the hills was the involvement of thousands of

37. Capt. D. Briggs, op. Cit., pg. 3; William Edwards, Superintendent of simla hill States 1847–52, observed, '15,000 to 20,000 men had on more than one occasion to be collected together from great distances.' quoted in E.J. Buck, op.cit., pg.14.

38. Accounts of the lifestyle of the British in the Himalayan hill stations, on which this assertion is based, can be found in many contemporary travelogues and in books which recount their histories like E.J. Buck, op.cit., and Pamela Kanwar, op. Cit., Rudyard Kipling, *Plain Tales from the Hills*, Calcutta, 1888, also contains much information of this nature. Travellers often required from 10 to 60 or more coolies to carry the luggage of each individual. G.F. White, op. Cit., writes, 'At least 20 coolies per gentleman are required for the kit. Some retain upto 200 hill porters'.

Himalayan peasants in the carriage of British baggage. Every year saw an increase in the number of people trudging up the mountain paths to these hill stations trailed by long lines of porters.³⁹ Though the treaties with these Himalayan states made it mandatory for them to provide a quota of porters for British officials on duty, the actual requirements were much larger than what was available through these treaties.⁴⁰ The extra burden was managed by conscripting peasants to carry them at rates fixed by government.⁴¹ While the money was more than the portage rates in the plains,⁴² this conscription of labour was extremely unpopular among the peasantry. Every travel account and official document of this period has numerous references to the difficulty in finding coolies and supplies.

The reluctance to carry loads at rates even three or four times more than what was prevalent a few miles away in the plains needs some explanation. One major cause of this reluctance was that these requisitions for portage came at times that were important for the agricultural operations of the peasantry, and were not part of traditional demand made on them by the hill state or by the deity.⁴³ As discussed earlier, this was a region where commodity exchange was not part of the peasants' subsistence pattern and money was marked by its absence in the local economy. Further, much of the money was paid into the hands of the hill state official or village headman who dealt with the British and did not reach the hands of the peasants involved in the labour.⁴⁴ Lastly, the travel routes of the British were markedly different from those of local society and so was

39. For. Poll., 1st October 1832, No. 148, 'Hill Porters involuntary service to and from Simla.'; Capt. D. Briggs, op. Cit., pp. 1-3.

40. For. Poll., *Ibid.*, Capt. Kennedy notes here that he provided 3800 porters for the conveyance of the Governor-General's suite; also see footnote 37 above and Capt. D. Briggs, op.cit., pp. 15-6, 22.

41. For. Poll., *Ibid.*; and Capt. D. Briggs, *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.*

43. The beginning of the 'Simla season' in summer was the second half of April when the crops are ready for harvesting and the end of the season was when intensive labour was required, post-monsoon, in the fields. This fact is accepted in some British sources, for example, Capt. D. Briggs, op. Cit., pg. 3.

44. *Ibid.*

their entire pattern of involvement with the geography and climate of the region. This pattern was alien to the peasants recruited as porters and involved travel to unknown areas, regions of enemy clans, places of bad omen and such other like. We have evidence of sustained resistance to these labour requisitions of the British. Every travelogue recounts the instances of insubordination, feigning tiredness and ignorance of routes etcetera, by the hill peasants recruited as porters. Official documents too contain numerous references to such behaviour. This reluctance once led to the Governor-General being stranded for a few days when ‘... all the Porters absconded from [his] camp at a place called Trandee – one of the wildest and most inaccessible passes...’⁴⁵ But no reference is to be found to open rebellion on the question of labour requisitions till much later.

The cultivation of vegetables and fruits in summer to provide for the European population, and also the provision of food crops to the markets of these towns had become an established practice of the Himalayan villagers in the vicinity of these Hill Stations by the 1840s.⁴⁶ One account of this time lists wheat, oats, barley, rice, mustard seed, Indian corn, red and white potatoes, cabbages, cauliflower, artichokes, asparagus and other ‘English’ vegetables grown around Simla and which were available in the local markets.⁴⁷ This same source talks about fruits like apple, apricot, mulberry, fig, pear, peach, grapes and strawberry which are procured from the region for local consumption in the town. Captain Raper notes some of these products as commonly available during the 1808 Ganga survey⁴⁸ and Fraser also attests their presence as wild fruits during his travels in 1814–15.⁴⁹ The British introduced other plants – food crops, vegetables and fruits. Some, like

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- 45. For.Poll., 13th June 1851, Nos. 47–50, letter No. 128, from Superintendent of Hill States, to Secretary to the Board of Administration of the Punjab, Lahore, dated 26th March 1851.
 - 46. Capt. Thomas Skinner, *Excursions in India, including a Walk over the Himalaya Mountains*, 2 Vols., London, 1832, Vol. 1, pg. 227; W.L.L. Scott, *Views in the Himalayas, Drawn on the Spot, London, 1852*, Section titled ‘Spontaneous and Agricultural Production’.
 - 47. *Ibid.*
 - 48. Capt. F.V. Raper, ‘Narrative of a Survey for the Purpose of Discovering the Sources of the Ganges’, *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XI, 1810, pg. 474.
 - 49. J.B. Fraser, op. Cit., pp. 210, 272.

tea, failed to catch the imagination of the local peasants⁵⁰ but others, like potato which was introduced by Fraser during his travels, were widely adopted and their cultivation spread over the entire mountain tracts within a very short time.⁵¹ We do not have any reliable knowledge about the nature of the impact that this introduction of new crops and the cultivation of traditional crops for the town markets had on the local economy and on dietary habits. Greater acceptance of cash and expanding networks of commodity exchange in later periods of British rule can be found in the sources and one can only hazard a guess that this was the beginning of that process.

The first two chapters had indicated the existence of definite patterns of relations with the natural world. These included rhythms of agricultural and pastoral activities, and a certain organising of physical space for habitation, production and communication which coincided with these rhythms. The relation and interconnectedness of these got disrupted, to a greater or lesser extent, with the coming of the British. It has already been noted that demand for labour to carry baggage and personnel for the annual summer migration to the hill stations was unprecedented for the region's economy and social structure to cope with. What also needs to be noted is that this demand came at a time, both during the trip up at the beginning of summer and during the trip down at the end of the 'Simla season', when agricultural operations were at their most intense and every hand was necessary for a successful harvest. These were also the times for the herds to travel from one climatic zone to the other. Unfortunately, it is not possible to quantify in any manner the nature of this disruption but it seems obvious from the discussion of the previous chapter.

In the first chapter it was seen that the valleys and mid-mountain areas were preferred as places both for building habitations and for agriculture. These had the added benefit of access to water, mild winters and warm summers, gentler gradients for cultivation and easier communications through the valleys, which cut a natural passage through the mountains. The array of British interests in coming to the mountains was of a totally different nature. They were looking for the coolness of Europe's climate to escape the heat and

50. *Kullu 1897*, reprinted New Delhi, 1994, pp. 86–87.

51. Capt. Thomas Skinner, op. Cit., pg. 283; W.L.L. Scott, op. Cit.

disease of the Indian plains. Therefore, all the British settlements were built on the high mountain ridges between elevations of 5000 to 7500 feet that approximated their desired climatic conditions. Strategic reasons also necessitated the establishment of British positions on the mountaintops that commanded the surrounding valleys.⁵²

This change in the traditional settlement pattern had some important immediate consequences. The first was that there was no immediate clash between the existing settlements and those of the new comers at their point of conception. The British had practically a 'virgin field' (rather forest) to build their houses on. The second consequence of this was that the traditional routes and rhythms of communication and trade were upset. Within a short period of a few years the annual migration of the British became the largest flow of men and material in the region, and growing requirements of these towns necessitated a growing diversion of local products in the form of commodities. The communication links between these new settlements were also not part of the traditional pattern and may have upset the existing rhythm.⁵³ The disordering of agriculture and pastoralism was compounded, since now the peasants not only had to leave their villages but also travel to and through territories which were not part of their existing pattern. Apart from the psychological problems in a culture heavily infused with spirits, taboos and myths, it may also have disrupted the existing nature of social relations between the different clans and other groups. Lastly, it was difficult to procure water and essential food items in the vicinity of these new British settlements since they were situated on the mountaintops and ridges, while most of the springs and water sources were lower in the valleys. This necessitated the permanent employment of some local hill men to ferry water and supplies and to communicate with other settlements.⁵⁴

52. *Bashahr*, 1910, pg. 8.

53. A reading of the early nineteenth century European travelogues clearly indicates this. Capt. D. Briggs, op. Cit., pp. 1-5, also presents this fact with the help of statistics.

54. Pamela Kanwar, op. Cit., pp. 19, 24, 66.

The Settlement of Land Ownership

The British completed the first formal land settlement in the Western Himalayas in 1850,⁵⁵ immediately after the completion of their wars with the Khalsa, which resulted in the extension of their power throughout the Punjab plains and the adjoining mountains. Prior to this there were some tentative attempts at settling revenue matters in a few of the Hill states created at the conclusion of the Anglo-Gurkha war. The most prominent of these interventions was in Jubbal State where a long running quarrel between the *Rana* and his hereditary *Wazeers* led to a political and fiscal crisis. Tribute and Begar levies to the British, as laid down in the Sanad, were not given for three years and the dispute threatened to spread to other areas.⁵⁶ In such circumstances, the Agent to the Governor-General at Delhi directed the Political Agent of the Hill States to intervene and settle matters, both political and revenue.

The settlement that followed was merely an attempt to organise a regular collection of revenue, its peaceful distribution among the British, the *Rana* and the *Wazeers*, and an end to alleged misappropriation of the funds by the latter.⁵⁷ In this exercise the status of all agricultural land was fixed. Land which belonged to the *Rana*, his close relatives, the *Wazeers* and some important temples for their personal upkeep continued to be in their rent free status of *Muafi Jagirs*. On rest of the land, irrespective of the title and historical claims, rent was fixed in conformity with the local custom of measurements in *Joon* and *Patha*.⁵⁸ Many of the demands of Begar and the multiplicity

55. G.C. Barnes, *Report on the Kangra Settlement*, published jointly with J.B. Lyall, *Kangra Settlement Report*, of 1872 as *Report on the Land Revenue Settlement of the Kangra District*, Punjab, Lahore, 1889.

56. *Correspondence Relating to Jubbal Affairs*, H.P. Secretariat Library, Simla, (private collection of Mian Goverdhan Singh), (henceforth *Jubbal Affairs, 1833–1857*) Letter from Political Agent in the Hill States to the Agent to the Governor-General at Delhi, dated Sabathu, 15th June 1833.

57. *Ibid.*

58. One *Joon* is equal to a little less than one *Seer* of the North Indian plains, it consists of 16 *Patha* of equal weight, and these were the common measures of seed weight that were calculated to cultivate a certain area of land. Land measurement was not in terms of area but in the amount of seed that was needed to cultivate it. Therefore, the same figure of *Joon*

of collections in cash and kind on specific occasions, that were commonly levied by the *Wazeers* and the *Rana*, were abolished or regularised into specific fixed amounts. The correspondence concerning this affair between the various British officials records their discovery and growing knowledge of the nature of land rights, political relations and social practices that were prevalent in the region. With every new discovery and insight into the working of the Himalayan social formation, the opinions and policy prescriptions of the officials changed. The final assessment of land revenue that emerged from this exercise⁵⁹ was estimated at Rs 8,941, of which Rs 2,681 was the balance that was taken by the British government. This revenue assessment was exclusive of the assessment of Rs 2,910 that was made of the *Muafi Jagirs* mentioned above.

For the next two decades the main attention of the East India Company was directed towards the conquest of the Punjab province and not much attention was paid towards the internal workings of these Hill States. There were also not many troubles for the British in this region and the only feature of note during this period was the steady growth in the popularity of the Hill Stations which has been discussed above. The successful conclusion of their wars with the Sikhs led to a renewed interest in the Punjab Mountains, as the Western Himalayas were designated. This interest was evident in two events. One was the laying of a cartable road from the plains to the border with the Tibetan areas⁶⁰ and the other was the initiation of land revenue settlement. This land revenue settlement was, it must be noted, a part of land settlements of the entire province of Punjab and not confined to the mountainous parts. Rather the ideas that informed this settlement were those which were taken from the study of land relations in non-mountainous areas, and the entire exercise was executed as one single operation even though each district had its own settlement officer and its own schedule of operations.⁶¹ Not only are the differences between the plains and the mountainous regions

and *Patha* would actually measure a different area of fertile irrigated land as against stony dry land. See *Simla District, 1888–89*, pg. 79.

59. *Jubbal Affairs, 1833–1857*, pp. 4, 6.

60. The full account of the construction of this road is to be found in Capt. D. Briggs, op.cit.

61. G.C. Barnes, *Report on the Kangra Settlement*, op.cit.

important, within the mountainous regions, there are significant differences between the areas that fall in the Kangra foothills and those regions which lie in the higher altitudes. These differences were not incorporated into the policy directives of the land settlement, even though they impacted in many forms on the settlement operations and the final recommendations. Each officer had to introduce a series of qualifications and make special provisions for accommodating the differences in the nature of land holdings. But these do not seem to have led to any reconsideration about land relations or the nature of land possession in the mountainous areas. Let us see how this happened.

G.C. Barnes completed the first large-scale land settlement of the Western Himalayas in 1850 as already been noted. This settlement made the peasants individual right holders to the land they cultivated. In Kangra region, this was extended also to the waste and forest categories of land. This was not done in the higher regions of the district comprising Kullu, Lahul and Spiti. Here only the cultivated land was entered into the name of the individual peasant and the waste and forest categories were declared state property without disturbing the traditional usufruct rights. Two decades later Lyall reinforced the individual proprietary rights of the Kullu peasant on his land.

From the very beginning the British found no clear title to the land which they had conquered, whether it be agricultural land or forested slopes or land which had not been terraced for cultivation, and which they designated as waste.⁶² As in most other parts of India, there were a multiplicity of claims to the land and its produce in this region, and often these overlapped with each other. There were also no proprietary claims to land from any sources. The most exclusive claim to land was of the temples. Even here the element of ownership, as understood by the British in the context of a market economy, was absent.⁶³ In this situation, the British political agents and land settlement officers

62. For an extended discussion on this and related topics, see Chetan Singh, *op.cit.*, Chapters Two and Three, pp. 39–116.

63. *Religious Institutions in Kullu of the Kangra District*, Selections from the Records of the Office of the Financial Commissioner, Punjab, 1869, Vol. V, Chapter XXXIII.

assumed that the ruler of the tract owned the entire land and all these other claims, which fell short of ownership, were inferior to his.⁶⁴ This was the first a-priori assumption about the nature of land rights and social relations made by the British. It seems to have been informed by the notions of 'Oriental Despotism' and its consequent political arrangements that were current within British intellectual and official circles of that time.⁶⁵ At one stroke the entire territory of the Himalayan ruler was designated as his sovereign domain, under British paramountcy, unencumbered by any other claim. This interpretation of political relations and its codification in the British law gave the ruler of the Hill State an unambiguous right to land, which historically he had never enjoyed. It was a new and powerful asset to the ruler and was to define the altered character of the Hill State in the colonial period.

It may be useful to explore the reasons for this assumption that the hill state had uncontested control over land under its jurisdiction. The first point to remember is that the British did not realise that the question of political pre-eminence was far from settled in most parts of the Western Himalayas.⁶⁶ Multiplicity of claims to land, wherever noticed, were understood as the consequence of a weak ruler's inability to assert his control specially in a period of defeat and confusion as they termed the Gurkha rule, rather than as a feature of the region's political relations. His subjects' loyalty was divided

64. *Jubbal Affairs, 1833–1857*; G.C. Barnes, *Report on the Kangra Settlement*, op.cit.; J.B. Lyall, *Kangra Settlement Report*, op.cit.

65. These issues are discussed in Eric Stokes, op.cit., pp. 137, 245–48, 247, 274–77; and Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal*, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 25–31, though this book deals with the specificity of the Bengal Settlement, it provides useful material to understand the 'official' mind in the period of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

66. The best sources for this are the early records of the Assistant Political Agent based at Sabathu and Simla, e.g. *Jubbal Affairs, 1833–1857*. An interesting case of sheep robbing in the Rawingarh area by villagers belonging to the tract ruled by the Tehri-Garhwal *Raja*, and the manner in which the British officials attempted to override the local clan institutions and deal directly with the *Durbar*, is provided in For.Poll., 28th Nov. 1817, No. 44, 'Concerning Attack by Gurhwal villagers on people of Raeen'.

between the ruler of the Hill State and the clan with its deity. As noted in the previous chapter, the first was based on locality and the second on birth. The ruler of the territory had to actively negotiate his right to a part of the surplus with this other centre of power and often remained a junior partner, not in prestige and status, but in the share of surplus delegated to him. The conquering British did not comprehend these complexities and gave the *Sanad* to the designated *Raja* or *Rana* of the tract. While the power of the other political authorities did not immediately end with the granting of sovereignty to the ruler of the tract, it removed their legality. Over time the clan based political institution and offices of the people were classified as either 'cultural traditions' or 'feudal remnants', depending on the bias of the concerned British official, rather than living instances of the political life of the Himalayan people.

The second reason for the British to vest all land ownership in the ruler of the Hill State was that they did not recognise any other form of political authority in the region other than these rulers who had accepted British suzerainty. To accept other centres of legitimate power would undermine their own rule and it went against their concept of the 'Oriental Despot'. It was also the case that in most of the region the *Raja* or *Rana* was given pre-eminence in social and political rank, even where he was denied this status in the distribution of revenue collections. In a situation where they did not find any of the actual holders and cultivators of the land claiming ownership to it and no institution like the land market where this claim of ownership could be tested, it was but natural for British policy and the settlement officer to assume that the ruler vested all control in himself and others merely had rights of usufruct. It may also be noted that this interpretation suited the needs of the British who now claimed all the rights that had earlier accrued to the *Rajas* and *Ranas* in areas under their direct control, which was approximately half the Western Himalayas. This vesting of all rights and claims to the Hill State, and consequently to the Government of India, was necessary for a dispensation which was formally based on the rule of law. Acceding to the political authority of entities other than the *Raja* or *Rana*, would complicate British ability to legislate and govern the territory. This measure also proved essential to their control of the forests and to the rejection of the claims of the peasants to this and

waste land when disputes arose over the demarcation and reservation of large tracts of forest cover which were historically part of the peasant's productive assets.⁶⁷

This a-priori assumption regarding land ownership led the British to many *logically derived conclusions* about a whole range of issues, not necessarily a true representation of ground realities but which nevertheless affected the subsequent development of proprietorship in land and the character of the hill state. It was noted in the second chapter that there was a historically creative tension between and within the many different forms of political organisation prevalent in the region under study, and only a few of them could be termed as States. Membership of the political community was not based on ownership or control of land or any other economic resource but rather on ones affiliation to the clan. Thus kin, not property, was the primary marker of the social structure. Even the claim of the clan or its deity over territory was not akin to ownership but was rather an assertion of pre-eminence over other contesting claims to the 'spontaneous and agricultural produce' of that land.

Earlier it has been argued that class stratification and private property, with its parallel development of state formation, was retarded in the Western Himalayas. This should not be taken to mean that there was no stratification and that there were no superior claims on land or other economic resources. There were definite hierarchies in social status and in land possession. Often the same plot of land, specially agriculturally rich land, had more than one claimant to it. Land which was given as grant to Brahmins and other State officials, called *Muafi* or *Sasan*, was often cultivated by *Bethus*, who were bonded to the same tract of land over many generations and developed something of a life interest in it.⁶⁸ Many times entire

67. For details about the manner in which forest and waste lands were classified during the early land settlements see Chetan Singh, op.cit., Chapters 3 and 5; for a discussion on the nature of peasant protest against the forest laws and its effect on their economy, see Ramchandra Guha, op.cit., Chapters 4 and 5.

68. This information is available in all the Land Settlements of the region as well as in Gazetteers. A petition of one Duren Sing of Sirmoor provides interesting perspective on the importance of these grants to those who held them, For. Poll., 15th July, 1853, 85–86.

villages were granted to a family or person for services rendered, and this implied that the *Muafi* included the revenue and Begar of the village inclusive of the *Khash-Kanet* peasantry, the *Bethus* and other menial servants. The different nature of possession or ownership of land, specially agricultural, implied a range of political and social claims and responsibilities to the Hill State, the clan deity, the peasant *Khumri*, the bonded *Bethus*, and all of these were swept under the carpet by the new land settlements of the British. The large areas of cultivated land which were worked through *Bethus* or what the British termed as 'tenants-at-will' were not classified differently from those that were self cultivated.⁶⁹ All land was equally assessed, though some of the *Muafi* and temple lands were not required to pay revenue. But their political content was removed. Land became an economic asset while it lost its political power.

Land settlements recognised the rights of these non-cultivating owners, mostly Rajput *Jagirdars* and Brahmin *Muafidars*, in the same category as the cultivating peasantry.⁷⁰ British law made no difference between these two distinct local categories of land rights. Revenue was assessed at rates that were calculated after much research but applied universally to all the land. The only distinction made was in the fertility and yield of the land. The mode of labour use in the cultivation of land did not figure in the revenue assessment calculations. The *Khash-Kanet* cultivator was accountable for his land and the *Jagirdar* and *Muafidar*, accountable for their respective fields. Some might possess more and some less, but there was no distinction in qualitative – political and cultural – terms. In the pre-British scheme of things there was a big difference in political power embedded in different forms of land possession and labour use. The nature of obligations to

69. This is clearly evident in the Land Settlements of Barnes (1850) and Lyall (1872) and in later Settlements in the Simla Hill States.

70. Settlement Reports list two category of land holders, those who cultivate their land themselves and those who cultivate through 'tenants-at-will' or *Bethus*. But there is no difference in the amount of revenue assessed though often the *Jagir* and *Muafi* lands are not expected to pay the land revenue but only the cesses. See *Kumharsain Settlement Report*, 1895, 14/407, H.P. State Archives, pg. 5; *Jubbal Settlement Report*, 1907, H.P. Secretariat Library, (private collection of Mian Goverdhan Singh), pp. 17–18; *Mandi State Gazetteer*, 1920, H.P. State Archives, pg. 186.

the deity and the State and the authority to lay claim on the labour of others and on natural resources differed between the *Jagirdars*, *Muafidars* and the *Kanet* cultivating peasant.

The hierarchical layering of multiple claims on the same piece of land and the absence of ownership was at the root of the revenue practices that the British found so frustrating, irrational and liable to abuse from those entrusted with their collection.⁷¹ It was impossible to fix responsibility for land revenue dues on one person or institution in such a situation and consequently, there was no possibility of a fixed assessment or collection. That this situation reflected, and in turn sustained, multiple political power centres was also not something desirable from the perspective of colonial policy, which did not entertain the legitimacy of any political power other than the ordained ruler. It was therefore essential that one single person, or institution, be made responsible for land revenue and political stability.

The ruler, as the political owner of the land, and the peasant, as the unquestioned possessor of its cultivated portions, became the foundation of all British land settlements, as elsewhere in Punjab.⁷² The ruler of the Hill State became the *Malik-e-Ala*, superior owners, and the peasants were designated as the *Malik-e-Adna*, or inferior owners, and no other institution between them was afforded any legitimacy. The holders of *Jagirs* and *Muafi* land, the temples and deities were all included in the latter category and the numerous differences between these different tenures was effectively abolished. This device enabled the revenue demand to be pegged on the peasant, or whoever was the *Malik-e-Adna*, while political responsibility was

71. For the earliest British perceptions about the land revenue practices of the Himalayan States, see For. Poll., 25th July 1817, No. 35, Letter from Capt. G. Birch to Maj. Gen. D. Ochterlony, concerning bad harvest and revenue remission in Jaunsar Bawar; *Jubbal Affairs, 1833–1857*, pp. 1–3; For. Poll., 13th June 1851, Nos. 47–50, ‘Maladministration of Bussahir’. It was after the correspondence contained in the last reference that the British sent one of their revenue officers, under Governor-General Dalhousie’s personal instructions, to Bashahr to settle the land revenue and this proved the beginning of the troubles in that Hill State which culminated in the rebellion of 1857–58.

72. The ideas behind the framing of British policy for Punjab is discussed in Eric Stokes, op.cit., pp. 245–8.

centred on the ruler – a form of property that suited the requirements of colonial policy, but overturned the entire legal structure of land relations of the Himalayan people. It needs to be noted that this change in legal terms was instituted right from the initial moments of British rule. But it was actually felt by the local population only during the course of the land settlements that commenced at the conclusion of the Punjab wars, and as a result of disputes over claims to land and forests that needed to be adjudicated. Therefore, finds that the first popular rebellion against British land settlement occurred during 1857–58⁷³ and since then one finds a whole series of revolts against different manifestations of the new dispensation.

The institutions of tribal politics had often been intermeshed with those of the emergent states in the western Himalayas. Both these maintained their political authority by being the legitimate media for the community's access to natural resources on which it was dependent. The allocation of access to these resources and the fruit of their common labour, between individual members of the community, was an important function of these offices at all levels. The *Lambardar*, as a representative of the Hill State within the village, the *Seana* or *Mawai* in the clan *Khumri*, the *Pujari* and the *Goor* of the village deity, maintained their authority on the basis of this power and not necessarily on the quantity or yield of the land they owned. That the land under their possession was often more than the average village holding and also more fertile, was the result of this power and helped to further strengthen their authority but was not the origin or source of it.

British land settlements removed this link between power and natural resources. While they strenuously attempted to maintain as much of the traditional forms of land relations and local level political power, they invariably, and often self consciously, removed their mandate from the legitimacy of tradition to the force of British authority. Individual settlement officers could go out of their way to accommodate popular aspirations and 'harmless prejudices' but all executive authority exercised by the village or other officials was

73. From the available sources it seems that this rebellion had nothing in common with the other rebellions that were rocking British domination in the plains of North India and the timing appears to be a coincidence.

henceforth based on the final approval of the British Crown. The changes in the nature of land holdings described above undermined this power of the local authorities. Subsequently, the obedience of the peasants to their authority was mostly based on the power of tradition and the ability of these village leaders to gain employment in the local levels of British administration. In this latter capacity, the power of these local elites derived from their ability to misuse their access to the new sources of political authority rather than as a normal feature of their job, as was the case earlier, and this opened up the possibility of resistance of a quality very different from what was possible earlier. We shall consider the historical consequences of this for Himalayan society in later chapters.

Political Settlement: The Creation of Hill States

As noted earlier at some length in the previous chapter, the political landscape of the Western Himalayas in the pre-British period was a mix of clan based semi-egalitarian polities, proto-state structures and the intrusion of developed state structures from Punjab, Kangra, Nepal and sometimes, also the Gangetic Plains. They existed in a sort of historically creative tension where state structures were struggling for supremacy over clan polities. At no place was the power of these clan polities totally crushed. Some states had managed to reduce them to submission and effective political control, as in Sirmaur, Mandi, Chamba, Suket, Bilaspur and Nalagarh.⁷⁴ Other states had managed to establish their supremacy only by effecting significant compromises with these tribal polities, which usually took the form of co-option of tribal institutions or chiefs into the state structure and sharing the economic resources as in Bashahr, Kullu and Jubbal. Large areas of the region remained outside any effective control by state structures, though one or the other neighbouring states often forced them into military submission and tribute payment.

The British East India Company had sought the help of various kings and chiefs of the region against the Gurkhas on the promise of restitution of their territories. But after the war had ended large tracts

74. Refer to the respective sections of the Gazetteers of the different States; also see Hutchinson and Vogel, *History of the Panjab Hill States*, Lahore, 1933 (reprint, Simla, 1982), chapters I, II, VII, VIII, IX, XIII.

remained with the British. Some of these were retained due to their strategic importance for military control of the region.⁷⁵ Others were retained because of what the British termed as an absence of a clear claim to the throne.⁷⁶ A few states had large parts of their territory taken away from them due to their suspect loyalty during the course of the Anglo-Gurkha war.⁷⁷ Some States had to cede a part of their territory to compensate the British for the expenses incurred for liberating the affected rulers from the 'tyranny' of the Gurkhas.⁷⁸ On the whole though, much of the territory of the Western Himalayas was left in the formal control of the local rulers and chiefs. In the internal matters of these states the formal policy was to intervene as little as possible. But this was not easy to follow. Unless a strict check was kept by the British officers posted at Sabathu, Simla and Kotgarh, quarrels and skirmishes broke out between the different Hill States and it also proved impossible to get them to follow the terms of the Sanads, specially with regard to the supply of porters and the payment of tribute. It was primarily for these two reasons, apart from settling the administration during a ruler's minority that the British ended up intervening in their internal affairs in almost all the Hill States.

After the conclusion of the Anglo-Gurkha war in 1815 AD, the British formalised all these different polities into the Punjab Hill States,

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- 75. As the tracts of Kotgarh, Dagshai and Rawingarh. With changes in the strategic military perspective the importance of some of these changed too. Rawingarh was later considered of not much importance and exchanged with Keonthal state for the lands acquired for the town of Simla.
 - 76. Kotkhai and Sabathu are examples of such territories.
 - 77. The State of Keonthal was deprived of land yielding annual revenue of Company Rs 2,100 and Baghat was deprived of five of its nine parganas for such reasons. These lands, though, were not kept by the British but sold to Patiala State. Garhwal state, on the other hand, was dissected, by the British who kept the capital town and the more fertile lands and only the tract between the Yamuna and the Tons was returned to the ruler.
 - 78. Jaunsar and Bawar were two fertile tracts of the Sirmaur state that were kept for this reason and later incorporated into the Dehradun district. It may also be of interest to know that this tract has become famous for polyandry due to various anthropological studies of this practice in this area beginning with the works of D.N. Majumdar.

by granting them Sanads wherein they accepted British Paramountcy and promised to abide by the terms of the treaty. The British in turn accepted the chief and his territory as the sole legitimate power in the region and promised him protection from all threats.⁷⁹ The rulers of these Hill states were conceived of as little monarchs and their claim over the territory granted to them as absolute, with nominal internal independence under the supervision of the Crown. Under the terms of these treaties, the Hill states were expected to provide Begar labour to the British government and help the Paramount power in times of war. The practice of levying custom duties and other tolls on goods, people and animals crossing the boundaries of these States was abolished.⁸⁰ There were other conditions too like the injunction to build roads between places specified by the British to measurements spelt out in these treaties for easier transport. Female infanticide and *suttee*, which was confined to a few orthodox Hindu, ruling families, were also prohibited. The institution of these Sanads immediately changed the nature of the Himalayan polities. This change was most obvious in the clan-based polities bunched together as *Thakurais* in the Simla Hill states.

It has been noted in all other parts of British dominion of India that the institution of British paramountcy removed most internal or local checks on the power of the rulers in the native states. This was much more apparent in the Western Himalayas where historically the power of the rulers and tribal chiefs were circumscribed by entrenched powerful popular bodies. At one stroke, the rulers of these Himalayan Hill States were freed from the mandate of these traditional legitimising bodies. Henceforth the hill state existed not by the mandate of the deity of the ruling family or of the clan but by the pleasure of the British Crown. This change was not apparent immediately to the local population or the rulers. But over time as the functioning of the new system became more familiar to the Himalayan people, the nature of relations between the nascent social classes and political institutions transformed radically.

79. These Sanads are compiled in C.U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, Calcutta, 1892, Vol. I.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 351–352.

The unambiguous vesting of rights on their fields strengthened the position of the cultivating peasantry. In the territories of the hill states this was paralleled by a strengthening of the traditional power of the rulers vis-à-vis their subjects since the latter now had no direct say in the working of these States' administrations but had to route their opinions through the British officials. While this new system insulated the rulers of the Hill States from their subjects, it also ate into their power in areas like territorial expansion, revenue collection and judicial administration and ultimately, reduced their legitimacy and use from the perspective of the Himalayan peasant. British rule set well-defined limits to the power of the Hill State in accordance with what was perceived as local custom and traditional practice by officials on the field. Later economic processes heightened this contradictory development of the parallel strengthening of the positions of both the cultivating peasantry and the local rulers. The intrusion, staggered but sure, of money into the Western Himalayas through the establishment of British towns and through cash measurement of the revenue assessments converted the potential economic power which land ownership had given the peasantry into actual economic muscle.

The full potential of this was only actualised during the last decade of British rule and later, later chapters will describe. But the trend was unmistakable and, once in place, seemingly irreversible. The intrusion of money, implementation of land and forest settlements, and the establishment of British towns also put economic muscle into the hill states recently gifted political autonomy from the local communities. Unlike earlier, there was no constant negotiation and struggle of the Hill State with the local communities of peasants over the fixing of land revenue and its collection.⁸¹ Neither did the question of sharing

81. This is not to imply that negotiations about the nature and volume of assessment and collection of the State's revenue was rendered non-controversial. The large number of rebellions of the peasantry in almost all the Hill States attests to the intensity of the struggle over the appropriation of the surplus product between the cultivating peasants, the Bethu tenants, the Hill State and the British authority. But this negotiation was removed from the everyday functioning of traditional political institutions. Rules, regulations and laws for the legitimate collection of revenue and taxes were laid down and the contest was primarily over these enactments and their interpretation.

the surplus with the local deity and the other sacral institutions remain a matter of periodic disputes. Land was settled by the British officials, the revenue rates and forest lease were fixed for long periods and paid regularly into the State's treasury and there was an increase in the cash component of the revenue collected. Parallel to this, the establishment of British towns and sanatoria brought the various commodities of the Empire close to these rulers. Over time the dependence of these rulers on the produce of their Hill States lessened until it was possible for them to largely ignore the threats of rebellion and disruption of agriculture from their peasantry, since they were protected by British arms and markets. The link, which bound the Hill States to their subject population, lost its material basis and increasingly became a mere historical legacy and an ideological encumbrance.

As has been mentioned earlier, the *form* of the polity of these Hill States was attempted to be kept as close to tradition as possible by the British officials⁸² but their *nature* changed beyond recognition. The traditional sources for expressing public opinion, including the *Dumh* or rebellion, lost their potency, as the British increasingly became hostile to independent political initiatives by the people.⁸³ All demands had to be routed through the Crown Representative, and this lesson was learnt, a little late perhaps but with good effect, by the Himalayan peasants. As one shall see in later chapters, while the changed political situation strengthened the power of the Hill States' rulers more visibly and immediately, there was an equal strengthening of the position of the peasantry – both economic and political.

82. *Ibid.*; also see the discussions in the two volumes of J. Hutchinson and J. Ph. Vogel, op.cit.

83. By comparing the reaction, cautious and sympathetic, of the British government and its officials towards the rebellion of 1858 in Bashahr and their reaction, unambiguous and aggressive, towards the Mandi rebellion of 1909, it is possible to see the degree of change in the manner of the British reaction towards independent political peasant mobilisation. Interestingly both the rebellions had similar demands centred on the nature of land settlements and Begar. Chaman Lal Malhotra, *Himachal Ka Krantikarik Itihas* (in Hindi), Delhi, 1990, gives a reasonably correct description of the various rebellions that occurred in the Punjab Hill States during the British period but does not provide any sources or footnoted references for its account.

The contradictory strengthening of the power of the Hill State and its subject peasantry was finally resolved in the last decade of British rule. Both became functionally and ideologically independent of each other, though the consciousness of this permeated much later. This was so because the new found autonomy and consequent power of the Hill State was based solely on the political system of British colonialism, whether it was the political control over their subjects, the income from the forest leases or the collection of revenue. It lost its other independent basis that had formed its power base before colonialism.

On the other hand, the autonomy and growing power of the proprietary peasantry was based on the British transformation of their traditional rights in land into something to proprietorship, and its strengthening by the entry of markets and money. Once this change was effected and they were given unambiguous control over the land they cultivated, they became structurally independent of the Hill States' political authority, and this independence was manifested in the initiatives of the Praja Mandal agitations in the last years of colonial rule.

Clan and Deity under Paramountcy

It may now be useful to turn our attention towards the changes in tribal institutions, especially the clan deities, consequent to the process discussed above. As has been seen in the last chapter that the clan deities and other spirits and temples were part of the Himalayan political structure. They were autonomous of the structures of the Hill State but intermeshed with it in the processes of surplus appropriation and political control. While they gave legitimacy to the State among its subjects, their autonomy was also an important political resource for the clans and the individual peasant against the power of the State. That these deities and their establishments had independent access to a share of the surplus meant that they could sustain this autonomy in the changed circumstances brought about by British rule. This was possible primarily because the British did not make any distinctions between the different claims that different institutions had on land and its resources. Large areas were identified as land claimed by the village deity and maintained revenue free as per the norms of traditional

practices.⁸⁴ These provided a stable and constant source of resources to these divine institutions even under the British dispensation, but simultaneously they lost their political role as mediators between the authority of the Hill State and the peasantry. Thus, they were able to maintain their traditional autonomy vis-à-vis the State. They remained the focus of the villagers' spiritual and community identity and their juridical and political functions within the clan remained intact. While their material link with the hill state was broken, their relation with the clans and its components continued, albeit in entirely different circumstances.

The last chapter had discussed how appropriation of surplus by the temples traditionally had two important functions. It reduced the possibility of individual accumulation of wealth among the peasantry and at times of great necessity both the Hill State and the peasantry turned to the accumulated riches of the temples for succour. But most important of all, the temples provided the legitimate *form* for surplus appropriation by the Hill States. Whether it was labour levees of Begar, collections in kind of agricultural and pastoral produce, the collection of natural wealth or the levying of duties and imposts on people of other domains, the manner and institutions of surplus appropriation of the State mirrored that of the village deities. In a sense, these deities provided the model of governance for the Hill State by defining, through popular participation, what constituted legitimate State authority.

This last function of the clan deities was lost with the institution of the laws of the British colonial state and specially, land settlements. The collections of revenue were patterned as closely to traditional systems as practicable under the new dispensation too, and often the difference of form was negligible. But their authority now derived from the British Crown. While earlier the *Pujari* and *Goor* of the deity could adjudicate on the validity of a Hill State's demand on the basis of customs ultimately sanctioned by divine will, now these matters were decided by British officials like the settlement officer or the Superintendent of Hill States on the basis of policy decided in Lahore, Calcutta or London. There was another major change in the structure of Himalayan politics. The political stability provided by the British

84. *Religious Institutions in Kullu of the Kangra District*, op.cit., pp.247–60.

Sanads, the regular income from land and forest revenue and access to commodities reduced the hill states' need to draw on the economic and political resources of the deity, and its establishment for the stability and protection of their own rule. That they still did so was more due to the common reluctance to forego privileges, than a stark necessity. But these were no longer crucial to the survival of the Hill States as they had been before the arrival of the British.⁸⁵ This is seen in one Hill State after another, where they are protected by British arms from the discontent and tumult of their subjects.⁸⁶

The deities traditionally had two roles, mediating the relations between the state and its subjects and supervising the political arrangements within the clan or devotional community. With the loss of the first function, the second rose in importance and simultaneously changed its character.⁸⁷ The loss of the deities' political authority vis-à-vis the hill state, meant that the peasant proprietors had to find other methods and institutions to express their opinions and influence policy. This search went on for long.⁸⁸ Initially the *Dumh* or traditional rebellion continued as the favoured method.⁸⁹ But it had severe

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- 85. This point shall be discussed in some detail in the next chapter.
 - 86. Bushahr in 1858–9 and 1907, Suket in 1878, Keonthal between 1893 to 1898, Mandi in 1893 and 1909, Suket in 1878, Bilaspur in 1930, Dhami in 1939, Koti in 1912 and 1944, and many other Hill States needed the direct intervention of British police or troops to pacify rebellious peasants in their States who were almost always protesting either against the land Settlement and revenue collection, or against the indifference of the hill states' authorities to their problems.
 - 87. This is the sense that one gets from a study of the various sources about the nature and function of these deities during the colonial period though it is difficult to give exact references. H.A. Rose, op. Cit., and H.W. Emerson, *Anthropological Study of Mandi and Bashahr*, Unpublished Typescript, MSS. EUR. No. 0321, OIOC, are two detailed studies on this issue and both would support this contention.
 - 88. The first rebellion against British administration and its effects was in Bashahr in 1858 and the earliest civil disobedience movements can only be traced from the late 1930s.
 - 89. There were eight major rebellions in the Punjab Hill State areas during the colonial period, not counting the Satyagrahas initiated by the Praja Mandals in the 1930s and 1940s; see Chaman Lal Malhotra, op. Cit., pp. 69–86.

limitations in that it was sporadic, needed large sacrifices from its participants and often did not serve the intended purpose because of strong action by a suspicious British officialdom. It was only later in the third decade of the twentieth century that the *Praja Mandals* developed as successors to the *Dumh* but equally well qualified for legal civil agitations.⁹⁰ In this search for new forms of political action the institution of the clan deity became an important social unifier for the Himalayan peasant. Often the assertion of traditional practices sanctioned by the divine will of these clan deities became the rallying point for this peasantry whether on issues of forest rights, *Begar*, land revenue demand or political reforms. These clan deities were transformed from being live players in the political economy of pre-British Western Himalayas to symbols of social identity and sources of alternative values for the Himalayan peasant during the course of the encounter with colonialism.

The most striking example of this transformation in the function and nature of the Himalayan deities is the conquest by Mahasu of the divine territories of rival deities. This deity, who is actually a confederation of four divine brothers, has its main seat at a place called Hanol in the State of Tehri-Garhwal. It is supposed to have come to these mountains from Kashmir at the request of a local Brahmin to save him from the tyranny of some demons, but this legendary origin story cannot be historically validated. Over the period of the nineteenth century Mahasu staked his claim to the allegiance of the Himalayan population between the Sutlej and the Yamuna under threat of sending pestilence and calamity on those who refused his divine overlordship! He was successful in asserting this claim and driving out many of the traditional deities of the villagers by demonstrating his power and ‘destroying’ those who opposed him. The conquest over other deities and his spread was paralleled by a growing assertion of the peasantry’s proprietary rights over land and an urge to reform social practices, like polyandrous marriage and divorce, in the light of orthodox Hindu customs. This phenomenon is discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

90. This is discussed in my article, ‘Unfree Labour under Colonial Impact: “Beth” in the Simla Hills’, *Social Action*, Vol. 46, No. 4, Oct-Dec. 1996, pp. 421–22.

Penetration of Money: Commodities, Labour, Land

Money came into the Western Himalayas through two main sources: the growing British towns and markets, and the settlements of land revenue and forest rights which were based on the money value of the various products calculated according to the prevalent rates in the above mentioned British towns. But before studying the manner of penetration of money, it may be useful to recapitulate the discussion on the presence of money transactions and circulation of cash in the period before the arrival of the British. Trade and pilgrimage were historically the means through which cash had penetrated into the Himalayas. The main trade routes like the Sutlej valley had a few developed market towns and trade fairs where a considerable amount of the exchanges were conducted in cash. Goods and money came here from a large hinterland in the Indian plains and from the trans-Himalayan regions. Even so a majority of the trade, whether accounted for in value or in quantity of goods, depended on barter exchanges. Most of the cash that was used for this purpose did not percolate into the local economy of the villages but was used for deferred exchange by those in trade.

The other means of cash inflow into the region was pilgrimage to the places of Hindu religious importance like Gangotri, Badrinath, Kedarnath, etc. A British source from the early nineteenth century records the organised nature of collecting the water of the Ganges at its source in Gangotri and supplying this in bottles to be sold in the towns and markets in the plains. Apart from this business of supplying water, there was also the regular pilgrim traffic to these places which needed to be fed and housed, thus developing a sort of proto-tourist industry along the valley of the Ganges and the Yamuna. While the valley of the Sutlej was not very important for pilgrim traffic, the Beas valley too catered to pilgrims moving towards Beas-Kund and Manikaran. Apart from this the Beas valley also provided an alternate route during summer for the trade that usually passed through the Sutlej valley.

What is of importance for the present discussion is that this cash flow was mostly limited to the above mentioned routes and did not disperse into the region as a whole. Thus, one finds frequent references to the unavailability of cash, or the refusal to part with goods or

provide labour for rates, much in excess of those prevailing rates a few miles distant in the plains. This feature changed within a few decades of the coming of the British.

Let us first look at the role of the hill stations in introducing money. This was mainly through two means. Firstly, these towns grew into sizeable populations of Europeans and their Indian servants from the plains during summer. This population needed vegetables, cereals, meat and labour services for menial work and portage of goods. While a part of the labour and menial work was done by servants imported along with the rest of the baggage from the plains, the requirements of food were almost entirely procured from the neighbouring villages.

Soon the commercial networks of these hill station markets spread deep into the interior from its beginning in the nearby villages. Apart from the requirements of food, there was the requirement of wood for building houses and for fuel. This too was entirely provided from the neighbouring forests and the villagers were very often the ones employed for the purposes of cutting and transporting the trees to these towns. One of the main reasons for this was that most of the servants who came up from the plains were not very good at carrying loads or travelling on the mountain paths. The early settlers in this region were the army garrisons which, it seems, were dependent on the local villages for supplies. A part of their requirements were hauled up from the plains and some army contingents also cultivated part of their food requirements in their spare time. The reluctance of the villagers to part with their stocks of food-grain for any form of monetary compensation has been repeatedly recorded in British documents and travelogues. It is also recorded that the use or threat of use of arms by the soldiers overcame this reluctance. Thus, the situation continued for some years in most of the army garrisons.

The early settlers in towns like Simla and Mussorie were mostly civilians or military officers off duty. They often needed, specially in the early decades, some amount of direct force for inducing the villagers to part with their stocks of food grains or labour.⁹¹ It is not

91. See For. Pol., 12th August, 1831, Nos. 1–37, for a series of very interesting cases involving disputes between British residents of Simla and their locally employed labourers and with the Keonthal Hill State from which land was taken to build the town. These disputes, at least three of them, reached the Governor-General at Calcutta and also involved the British

possible to state precisely the manner of the early interaction between British settlers and the Himalayan peasant but two propositions could be hesitatingly advanced. First, the actual amount of interaction between them would be much less than in the towns and cities of the plains because all British settlements in the Himalayas were in areas which were mostly uninhabited. This point has been discussed earlier and so needs no further elaboration. Second, it is important to remember that there was not a uniform non-acceptance of money in the entire region. The emergence of these British towns enabled the spread of this previous *sporadic monetisation* into all regions of the Himalayas. It had been noted in the second chapter that even in regions where money was used, its acceptance was limited to certain goods and services traditionally defined as tradable. With the coming of the British an ever increasing number of goods and services became converted into commodities in the true sense with the spread of monetisation to ever larger areas of the economy.

Even this new monetisation with the coming of the British had a regional bias. It was most prominent in areas which were close to Simla and the other British settlements, and much less in areas from where it was not possible for the peasants to regularly access these towns on foot. In the period from 1857 to 1881, the price of wheat in Simla district doubled from 34 Seers to the Rupee to 17 Seers to the Rupee.⁹² The price of unhusked rice too increased by the same degree, from 42 Seers/ Rupee to 21 Seers/ Rupee.⁹³ Maize went up from 48 Seers/ Rupee to 22 Seers/ Rupee, green ginger from 49 Seers/ Rupee to 26 Seers/ Rupee.⁹⁴ Similar was the case with *dals* and *ghee*.

This increase in the prices of locally produced agricultural goods was in a context where the volume of sales went up much more than the prices. There are no dependable sources for the statistics of local trade volumes to substantiate this claim but it would seem probable if the increase in the population of these Hill Stations is kept in mind.

residents in bitter quarrels between each other. What can be clearly noticed is the clear extending of boundaries of British intervention into the local economy and society with the settlement of each case, whether it was decided in favour of the local population or of the British residents.

92. *Simla District 1888–89*, pg. 77.

93. *Ibid.*

94. *Ibid.*

There was an increase of 126% in the population of Simla district between 1868 to 1881.⁹⁵ At the latter date the total urban population stood in excess of twenty two thousand, of whom more than three thousand were Europeans, with as many as three five thousand houses in Simla alone. This could also be compared to 1841 when the town had about a hundred permanent houses, two hundred European residents out of a total of about ten thousand, during a very busy season when the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief both visited the town.

In the aftermath of the 1859 rebellion in Bashahr against cash assessment and collection of land revenue, the British reverted to the old system of revenue administration. This was composed of Rs 5,372 in cash collections and eighteen different *Karhads*, or collections in kind, which included everything from agricultural produce, pastoral goods, products collected from the forests and articles manufactured at home.⁹⁶ There was no value put on these Karhads since no measure of market was available which would be a true representation of the entire region, and not confined to Rampur town influenced by the trans-Himalayan trade. This composition of the revenue collected changed within fifteen years when the 1874 land settlement retained only five of the original Karhads and the cash component of the collection went up to Rs 13,640 out of a total assessment of Rs 28,649, inclusive of the value of the Karhads.⁹⁷ Within thirty years of the 1859 rebellion against cash collection, the land revenue of the [State] had gone up to Rs 35,904.⁹⁸ Though there is no record of the cash component of this demand, we can safely assume that it must have seen a rise from the previous settlement. These revenue demands were in addition to the six months of Begar that each peasant household had to provide to the State every year. This Begar demand was reduced to one month per annum from the land settlement of 1888 and a commutation rate of Rs 7 and 8 annas was fixed.

95. *Ibid.*, pg. 33. It is noted here that the increase is almost entirely in the towns and British cantonments.

96. *Bashahr*, 1910, pg. 70.

97. *Ibid.*

98. *Ibid.*, pp. 70-72.

Begar had also to be provided to the British officials who came up in increasing numbers every summer. This Begar was provided for in the terms of the treaties, which bound the Hill States to the paramount power. Soon the number of Begaris stipulated in these treaties was found inadequate to meet the growing demand. In the hill tracts it was imperative that a proper supply of hill peasants was available to carry baggage, people and for sundry other work during the summer season.⁹⁹ This extra labour was conscripted from among the population of the Hill States in the ratio set out in the Sanads of 1815 and 1816. While it was forced labour, it was also paid for in rates fixed by the government and which seem to be higher than that which were common in the plains. It is not certain that these rates were paid regularly in the beginning, specially by private British civilians who hired these peasants as coolies. The following illustration will hopefully show the nature of labour demand even in the early days of Simla's existence when the total number of European summer residences was less than one hundred.

In 1832 the Governor-General Bentinck wrote to the Political Agent of the Cis-Sutlej Hill States regarding reports that he had heard about forceful conscription of the labour of Hill peasants for carrying the baggage of British travellers to the Himalayas, suggesting that rates should be fixed and payments made 'punctually and to the full extent' so that this labour becomes 'desirable' for the natives and force becomes redundant in procuring Hill porters.¹⁰⁰ In reply captain Kennedy observed that the transport of the baggage of the Governor-General and his suite required the labour of 3,800 men with more than three trips per person. But he refused to recognise that this was 'involuntary' labour since the Sanads granted by the British to these Hill States made it mandatory for them to provide labour to the paramount power. In keeping with the Governor-General's wishes

99. William Edwards, Superintendent of Simla Hill States, attempted to reduce the number of porters impressed by private individuals under the terms of the Sanads granted to the Hill States, in 1851 led to a minor rebellion among the Europeans at Simla and eventually led to his removal from the post. For. Poll., 5th December 1851, No. 163, 'Impressment of Coolies in Simla District.'

100. For. Poll., 1st October, 1832, No. 148. The rest of the paragraph is based on this source.

rates were fixed for Hill Porters. It was made mandatory to inform them about the period that their labour was required, and it was also ruled that in cases where they are detained for longer than the specified period without taking their labour, they will be paid demurrage. One 'mate', also a Hill peasant, was to oversee the labour of fifty porters, their pay being Rs 3 for the mate and Re.1 Annas 8 for the porters for one trip from the plains to Simla apart from demurrage which was fixed at 2 Annas per day. It was also specified that each porter would not be burdened with more than 30 'pucca seers' of baggage. The Governor-General also specified in his order to the Political Agent that the clause demanding free labour from the Hill States was meant for war situations and labour conscripted for the annual summer trip to Simla could not be taken under those terms.

This 'improvement' in the conditions of labour conscription was based on previous years experiences, when many disputes arose between the British residents of Simla and the local people who provided labour for transport of baggage and persons, for house construction and for other sundry jobs.¹⁰¹ Two of these involved a certain Major Spiller, who selected a spot and built a house there in 1831.¹⁰² In the first complaint, thirty four men seem to have been employed by the Major but when they left their employer he refused to pay them Rs 68, claiming that they had broken their contract. In the second complaint seventeen men claimed Re. 1 each for eight days work from the Major. Then towards the end of the year two peasants from nearby Simla petitioned Bentinck that the Political Agent, Captain Kennedy, had employed forty coolies for ten months for repairing and maintaining the Subathu Simla road and six other

101. The first attempt at disciplining and structuring the labour procured from the Himalayan peasants was made in the beginning of March 1831 when terms of employment were set out by the Political Agent. It involved control of vagrancy among the native population of Simla, curtailment of drinking and gambling, control over their movement in the town at specified hours and the need for a notice period before leaving any employment with a British resident. The last was found to be very necessary since these labourers were 'notorious' for their fickleness and lack of loyalty to their masters. See For. Pol., 12th August, 1832, Nos. 28–29.

102. *Ibid.*

labourers for personal work for six years without any payment. Since these men had been provided to Captain Kennedy by these two peasants, they wanted to be compensated.¹⁰³ Captain Kennedy, in his official correspondence on this issue, mentioned the Sanads granted to the Hill States, which stipulated that they would construct and maintain roads in the hills and provide labourers for the needs of the British officials.

In spite of rates being fixed for all labour procured from the Himalayan peasant, and the Governor-General's interpretation of the clause providing free labour as pertaining only to a war situation, it does seem that the free procurement of hill porters continued for much longer. But the government seems to have, over time started paying the labourers conscripted at the rate fixed. With the increase in the number of British officials visiting these Hill Stations every summer, the amount of labour required and the money disbursed also saw an increase. Whatever be its impact on the rhythm of rural life in the Western Himalayas, it definitely became a major source for the injection of cash into the hands of peasants, who had previously had very little contact with, or need of, money. According to Captain D. Briggs, involved in the construction of the Hindustan–Tibet road, the British government spent over seven lakh rupees between 1820 to 1852 in payment to the Hill peasants to carry baggage and personnel up to Simla at the beginning of the summer and down again six months later. One must be cautious about this figure for two reasons. Firstly, this calculation was part of the report on the operation conducted with the building of the aforementioned road and its utility needed to be highlighted. Secondly, as Captain Briggs himself added, often the mates (agents of the Hill States or the village headmen) pocketed the money. These mates acted as contractors for labour and it was through them that payments were disbursed to the Begaris. He tried to stop this by disbursing the money directly to the Begaris but found that still the money often landed up in the pockets of the headmen primarily because the Himalayan peasants were not conversant with getting paid for labour provided to rulers and other superiors. Thus, they did not demand money compensation for the inconvenience of being conscripted for labour at the most important periods of

103. For. Pol., 23rd January, 1832, Nos. 50–53.

agricultural operations.¹⁰⁴ They merely complained about and evaded this disruption of their agricultural rhythm; resistance and rebellion came much later.

Given all these qualifications, it is still possible to make out a case for the gradual increase of cash flow into the village communities and into the hands of the peasants. This is evident from the increasing acceptance of cash as a measure of assessment of revenue and as a means of payment among this very same peasantry. The labour conscripted by the annual 'pilgrimage' of British officialdom to their 'little Englands' perched on the commanding ridges of the Himalayas, was matched by the growing incidence of labour provided by these very peasant communities for the working of the forests for commercial logging. While the former was taken by force, the latter was entered into willingly so as to supplement the income of the peasant family.¹⁰⁵ The usual pattern was that one brother of a fraternal polyandrous family would go and find employment in forest operations, bringing cash which added to the monetary pool which enabled the initial entry and subsequent continuation of these peasant families in the markets of the British towns and garrisons. It often formed the initial capital on which was based the later expansion of commercial agriculture and the formation of the land market in these mountains.

Before continuing with the rest of the discussion it would be useful to recapitulate the chronology of the process described above. Initially the treaty obligations proved sufficient in providing labour to the

104. As the illustration in the previous paragraph shows, the labourers were organised by one or two men of influence and the money was often demanded by them. Even in the cases involving Major Spiller, the men dispersed to their villages after petitioning the Political Agent and did not pursue the matter. It may also be important to note that the 34 men of the first petition were from the Sutlej valley and the 17 men of the second petition were from across the Sutlej. When the first set found the job not to their liking they decided to leave without any notice, a clear breach of contract as pointed out by the Major. One must also keep in mind the various references from this time to the lack of money and its disregard by the villagers when asked to do jobs for monetary compensation by travellers and officials.

105. Emerson, op.cit., Chapter I, pg. 12.

British personnel but soon larger numbers of porters were required with the blooming of the Hill Stations. This labour was mostly conscripted and proved unpopular with the peasantry involved. Hill State officials and headmen often embezzled the money given for this extra labour, but some did find its way into peasant hands. The growing demands of these burgeoning towns for agricultural produce and labour provided an impetus for the initiation of commercial operations in agriculture, albeit at a sporadic and local level. In this initiation of commercial agriculture, the money earned from conscripted labour provided the initial capital and induced the search for other avenues of cash earnings. This unprecedented search for employment for cash coincided with the beginnings of large-scale commercial operations in the forests of the region, and thus soaked in much of this labour supply. The increasing demand for 'hands' in the British towns too became a source of monetary income and these further impelled the drive for commercialisation in agriculture.

It was in this context that the potential of the new property rights vested in the peasantry as a result of the land settlements was actualised, and activated in much of the Western Himalayas.

There was another mode of entry for cash into the region and that was the lease that the Hill States gave to the British government to manage and work the timber forests in their territories. By the end of the nineteenth century almost all the forests of the Beas, Sutlej and Tons river basins were under lease to the British. Forest settlements detailing the rights of the British, the Hill State, the peasants and the pastoralists were completed in most of these forests.¹⁰⁶ In 1877 the Bashahr forests were taken under an annual lease of Rs 10,000.¹⁰⁷ By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries each mature Deodar tree fetched anything between Rs 100 to 150 in the timber market.¹⁰⁸ This should be compared to the value of Re.1 during the 1850s¹⁰⁹ and

106. An exhaustive account of the evolving relation between these stakeholders in the Himalayan forests is contained in Chetan Singh, *op.cit.*, pp. 141–174; and in Ramachandra Guha, *op.cit.*

107. Political Department, Indian States, B Proceedings, No. 97 of 1936. By 1929, this lease money had increased to Rs 100,000 plus half a share in the profits, in case the profits exceeded Rs 150,000.

108. *Punjab States Gazetteer, Keonthal Zaildars State Gazetteer*, *op.cit.*, pg. 15.

109. G.C. Barnes, *Memorandum*, pg. 128.

the practical lack of value two decades prior to that when no money needed to be paid for procuring timber, except a nominal amount to the controlling deity or ruler and some charges for labour.¹¹⁰ Besides Bashahr, Jubbal had the largest stocks of high quality timber in demarcated forests of over 56,730 acres. Under the working plan of 1900 AD for these forests, the annual felling of timber consisted of 2,200 mature deodar trees and a varying number of blue pine. This got in an annual income of over Rs 100,000 to this [State] which had an annual land revenue assessment of Rs 35,828.¹¹¹ Baghat state, which did not have very rich timber resources, had a population of 9,490, at the turn of the century, and its annual income from forests and land revenue was Rs 9,000 and Rs 8,613 respectively.¹¹²

Much of the timber in the area around Simla and the other British settlements had been worked to destruction in the early decades of the growth of these towns, when there was no proper supervision by the British government of the amount and quality of timber felled. By the time the forest settlements were initiated, states like Keonthal had no timber of market value.¹¹³ Timber, thus, was one of the first and most important routes for the introduction of money into the economy of the Western Himalayas, often overshadowing the relative importance of commodification of agricultural goods and labour services, as indicated by the figures given above.

These two processes of monetisation were very different in their character and consequences. The money that came through the sale of agricultural goods and labour services went largely to the peasantry. Two qualifications need to be made about this statement. First, the officials and rulers of the Hill States pocketed a part of the payment for labour services, sometimes the entire amount. Second, the private demesne of the ruler and his family, cultivated by Bethu labour, was most likely to produce surplus foodstuff, and thus a part of the money from the marketing of agricultural commodities would also go to them. Despite these qualifications, it seems possible to assert that the main impact of this monetisation was directly on the people.

110. *Ibid.*

111. *Punjab States Gazetteer, Jubbal*, op.cit., pp. 19, 25.

112. *Punjab States Gazetteer, Baghat*, op.cit., pp. 6, 9, 11.

113. *Punjab States Gazetteer, Keonthal*, op.cit., pg. 9: 'There is practically no old deodar, all having being sold to Simla traders during the last thirty years.'

In contrast, the money that came from the sale of timber, whether to private contractors or through government departments, went to the Hill State. It remained outside the peasant's economy. It strengthened the economic power of the Hill State and reduced its dependence on the produce of the peasants. It also helped in a closer integration of these Hill States to British colonial interests, by giving it an economic foundation of immense value to the rulers.

These two processes of monetisation were often simultaneous, but hardly ever met. In fact, they were the two sides of the emerging contradiction between the peasantry and the Hill State. The income from forests aligned the Hill States with colonialism, the money they received being dependent on the terms of the lease and not on the working of market relations. The tendency of the Hill States was to increase the amount of area under forest cover and support British attempts at preventing the peasantry from using the resources contained in these forests. On the other hand, the emergence of the peasant proprietor was based and sustained on the sale of agricultural commodities and labour services, without any direct official intervention. In their endeavour to enter the market the peasants strove to use every resource at their command, and reduce the fiscal and physical burden imposed on them. This brought them into direct confrontation with the Hill State and the British government, since the latter endeavoured to reserve as much of the forest as they could and increase land revenue in proportion with the growing prices in the local markets. This contradiction was at the root of most of the rebellions in the Western Himalayas.

Land prices witnessed an increase in this period which was marked by the establishment and growth of the market in agricultural land. It seems evident from our sources of the early part of the nineteenth century that most of the land that was used to construct the habitations of the British were on land that was not owned or claimed by anyone, and thus no prices were paid for it, though often a permission from the Raja was procured on the basis of some gift or *nazrana*.¹¹⁴ All this

114. Capt. Thomas Skinner, op.cit., pg. 214 recounts that the usual method of land acquisition in the Himalayas, in the 1820s and 1830s was to place a simple marker stating the 'discoverers' name and claim over the hill. George Francis White, op.cit., pg. 44, notes: 'When a person wishes to

land was procured for building houses and this involved primarily Europeans or Indians from the plains who settled in these emergent towns. By the last two decades of the nineteenth century it is possible to discern the existence and shape of a small market in agricultural land. During the settlement of Simla district by Col. Wace in the 1880s, it was noted that there had been 74 instances of sale of agricultural land, aggregating 239 acres, and 386 acres were under mortgage.¹¹⁵ It notes that the practice of selling land had arisen mainly during the 20 years previous to the settlement operations and the prices had increased by anything between three to four times. The rate at the time of the settlement was Rs 91 per acre cultivated for outright sale and Rs 74 per acre for mortgage. Irrigated agricultural land sold for a higher price. The report specifically notes that while the practice of mortgage was in existence earlier, sale and purchase of land are new to the region.

The emergence of a land market is also important because it was not followed by alienation of local cultivators' lands to outsiders. In Bharauli Ilaqa of the Simla district, which was much more accessible from the plains of Punjab than the interior areas of Kotkhai and Kotgarh, it is recorded that usufructuary mortgages cover one-twelfth of the cultivation. Of these only two were held by Khatri traders based in Sabathu, the rest being '*bona fide* transactions between the agriculturists themselves'.¹¹⁶ There were regional variations too in the nature of these commercial transactions between the lower hills and the higher mountains. For example, while in the lower areas there were not many sales of land, in Kotkhai and Kotgarh, sale and mortgage were both equally common, the size of the average sale being 2 ½ acres and the size of the average mortgage being ½ an acre. This may point to the fact that land was bought by splinter groups of older polyandrous families which were dividing and needed to set up an independent farming unit which would sustain them. On the

build among these hills, after selecting a spot,a board is usually placed up with the discoverers name, to shew that it has been taken possession of. This settled, the lease of the whole hill, covered with the finest timber, and abounding with game, may be obtained from the *Rajah* of the district for a number of years by the annual payment of a trifling sum'.

115. *Simla District 1888–89*, pg. 76.

116. *Ibid.*

other hand, families that wanted to increase the volume of their production, either to feed more mouths or to sell in the markets entered into mortgages.

This would perhaps point to an interesting variation in the social structure of the Western Himalayas. In the cultivated valleys of the Siwaliks, there may have been a simple growth of commercialisation in agriculture with peasants taking mortgages to increase their production to supply the markets of the British towns, which as seen, grew at phenomenal speed. The higher mountain areas witnessed two parallel processes under similar external stimulus. While there seems to have been an increase in the volume of production of individual peasant cultivators, aimed primarily at the markets, there was also the splitting of the polyandrous family, which had previously held its lands in common.

This would imply the initiation, at least, of a process of class formation, specially in a region where there was limited possibility of increase in area of cultivated land. The total area of cultivation did not increase, but land was nevertheless purchased by some who surely increased the size of their holdings at the expense of those who sold this land. This specific process of class stratification would have confined itself to landholders – the Khash peasantry, the high state officials and the members of the ruling family, leaving the land-less agricultural labourers, artisans and menials out of its ambit.¹¹⁷ This means that what one may be witnessing in this region towards the end of the nineteenth century is the emergence of class divisions within the land holding clans and village communities. The establishment of class relations in the context of a new and fast growing market would also have involved the Bethus and artisans too, but this was a process separate from the one discussed above and would be discussed separately.¹¹⁸

117. It is important to note that landless peasants were the Bethus, who did have land under hereditary occupation for cultivating, but this was not under 'occupancy tenancy' and they could be easily removed from its possession. Actual landlessness was rare in the region.

118. This paragraph puts forward some tentative suggestions about the direction that the transformation of social relations took in the Western Himalayas. The next two chapters will try to illustrate, substantiate and further elaborate these hypothesis.

The variation pointed out above seems to have been complimented by the difference in the incidence of monetisation between those areas where there was direct British contact and those that were somewhat distant from the British towns. Thus, one finds that in the Rampur grain market, the premier agricultural market of Bashahr State, the average prices of all grains went up by 34 % during a period of forty years from 1853 to 1894.¹¹⁹ In most of these hill states, which were distant from the British towns the increase in price was similar in magnitude. The primary means through which monetisation established itself into these regions was the commercial exploitation of forest produce and agricultural commercialisation was secondary. Recalling the discussion about the differing impact of monetisation through commercial forestry and through agriculture and labour, would indicate that this monetisation affected the local peasantry much less. There were two main motors of transformation in regions which were distant from the emerging markets or could not integrate into it due to other reasons. One was the introduction of commercial horticulture in the twentieth century, and the other was the unleashing of mass political movements for political participation, social status and against administrative and economic practices, like Begar, which hindered the peasantry's integration with the market. The next two chapters deal primarily with these aspects of the colonial history of the Western Himalayas.

119. *Bashahr, 1910*, pg. 55. Compare this to the doubling in twenty years in Simla discussed earlier.

CHAPTER FOUR

Peasant Rebellions and Royal Reconciliation: The British Rule Inside the Hill States

The emergence of a land market in the region of the Simla Hill States during the last years of the nineteenth century, and the consequent stratification within the egalitarian clans of the Khash-Kanet became causes for social disturbances even though they remained marginal to the economics of the peasant farm. Substantial details have been given in the hope that the flavour of social changes and the peasantry's response to these would emerge. It would become quite evident that the emergence of stratification within the peasant clans of the Khash-Kanet became a contributory cause of unrest as the effects of British rule became more obvious. The hill states became conduits for the transmission of British policy in the Western Himalayas. On the other hand, the British remained largely unaware of the receptivity of their policies by the people since channels for communicating this were interrupted, under normal circumstances, due to the formal independence of the hill states. It is, therefore, common to find that the normality of the hill states' existence was repeatedly questioned by the eruption of frequent rebellions. It is interesting to note that there were hardly any rebellions in areas like Kullu and Kangra, which were directly administered by the British. While the hill states buffeted British rule in the region, they simultaneously helped to bring to the fore the more glaring of the contradictions contained within it and eventually became the weakest links of colonialism in the Western Himalayas. This journey of the Punjab Hill States from being the

bulwark of British rule in this wild mountainous terrain conquered from the Gurkhas for other strategic reasons, to becoming its most vulnerable part is best exemplified by the reactions and rebellions which occurred in them and which will form the subject matter of this chapter.

Every rebellion was directed formally against the authority of the local ruler or his administration but substantively went against the very basic features of colonial rule in the Western Himalayas. Therefore, in every one of them, the British had finally to intervene – as a friendly arbitrator in the beginning but increasingly as a partisan against the peasants. But beyond these very general similarities, the structure of the rebellions, their social composition, the nature of their politics, British perceptions and the manner of their response, the demands raised by the rebels and many other such features changed during the century covered by this study. This chapter endeavours to trace these changes and provide some initial steps to understanding them.

From very early in their rule, the British had to deal with popular refusals to accept rules, laws and demands they made. These often took forms that have been described as ‘everyday resistance’ in another context.¹ This chapter does not involve itself with these but rather concentrates on open mass acts of refusal to obey government authority. Some of the features of everyday resistance, specially desertion from villages and cultivation, and mass avoidance of authority were central features of the *Dumh* – the traditional method of mass protest. But other defining characteristics of ‘everyday resistance’ are marked by their absence. Moreover, in a context of proprietary peasant masses organised in clans, relatively powerful vis-à-vis the Hill State and egalitarian within, the concept of ‘everyday resistance’ is a misfit.²

1. James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Delhi, 1990. For the use of this concept on South Asian situations see, Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, eds., *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, Delhi, 1991.

2. James Scott, op.cit., pg. xvi, includes foot dragging, dissimulation, desertions, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, etcetera as various forms of everyday resistance. This study and the different studies of Haynes and Prakash’s book are situated in social

This chapter consists of five detailed studies of events in five different Hill States, which are taken as illustrative of the entire colonial period, and which resulted in political dislocation, rebellions, and reworking of the political relations between the subjects, the rulers of these Hill States and the British.

The first example taken is of Bushahr in the mid-nineteenth century, which saw massive peasant mobilisations against the introduction of the first cash based land revenue settlement of the region. This rebellion was peacefully ‘pacified’ through the intervention of a British officer who successfully arbitrated between the demands of the peasantry and the colonial need for a scientific settlement of the State’s revenue.

The second example – the deposition of the Suket Raja under popular pressure – highlights the political contradictions inherent in attempting to continue with local forms of administrative authority and State power under the new economic and political conditions and the manner in which the British addressed these.

The hill state of Mandi, the third example, is studied to highlight the shift in British attitudes towards popular mobilisations by the Himalayan peasantry, from an indulgent paternalism over ‘noble savages’ to an increasingly unsympathetic approach to peasant unrest. It is in Mandi that a serious use of the army to crush mass civil protests is recorded for the first time.

The fourth example, Dhami, is important for various reasons. It heralded the beginning of political organisation of the peasantry through the Praja Mandal and the entry of the Himalayan peasant into the larger stream of the National movement. Koti, the concluding example of this chapter, is studied because it is perhaps the first and only instance of a rebellion of the Bethus – the bonded agricultural labourers of Dagi-Koli origin. The rebellions of Mandi (1909) and

relations of strong, codified and enduring hierarchy of ritual and economic power. Both these books also seem to have lumped distinct forms of expression of dissatisfaction and anger at prevalent social and political relations into one catch all category of everyday resistance. Some of the forms of everyday resistance were not only resources of the oppressed but also were equally used as tools of domination by those wielding power.

Dhami (1939) clearly show evidence of stratification within the Khash-Kanet peasantry, while the example of Koti indicates the possible emergence of a strata of upwardly mobile, market-integrated Bethus, who were finding it difficult to break out from the extra-economic shackles of their bondedness.

Bushahr Rebellion, 1857–58

The State was headed by a Raja who claimed divine origin from a family that supposedly migrated into the mountains sometime in the distant past.³ The Raja who headed the State at the time of this rebellion claimed to be the hundred and eighteenth from the founder of the dynasty. The State was broadly divided into three provinces, two of them were in the monsoon region of the Himalayas and one straddled the trans-Himalayan areas till the undefined borders with Tibet.⁴ This latter province was called Kinnaur and its main settlement was at Chini. The people were of the Tibetan race, followed the Lamaist-Buddhist religion and had a totally different structure of political economy from the rest of the kingdom, mainly due to the differences in climate caused by the absence of monsoon rains on the other side of the Great Himalayan range. Agriculture, for them, was not as important to their survival or prosperity as pastoralism and trade.⁵ The monsoon regions of the State were the Rampur pargana and the Rohru pargana, the former comprised the valley of the Sutlej and the latter comprised the valley of the Pabur, which was, in turn, a part of the Tons basin. These valleys, specially Rohru, were agriculturally very rich and grew a considerable surplus of food crops; specially rice and stuff like ginger and opium. Both had the form of political economy that has been discussed in some detail in chapter two. A *Wazeer*, who was responsible for the collection of revenue and for political administration, headed each pargana. These *Wazeers* were nominated from a specific family in each region, which had hereditary

3. *Punjab States Gazetteer, 1910, Bushahr State*, (henceforth *Bushahr 1910*), reprinted Delhi, 1995, pg. 5.

4. *Ibid.*, pg. 4.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 35–40.

rights to this office and were the pre-eminent political family of that pargana. The Raja's power was exercised through these officials.⁶

Each *Wazeer* was responsible for both the assessment and collection of revenue dues of his pargana. Apart from the regular collections different State officials collected their dues directly from the peasant. The principle of collection was that the State had a share in everything that the peasant produced and also that every requirement of the State had to be provided for by the subjects. This led to an average of eighteen different collections, mostly in kind, from the peasant in any given year.⁷ Apart from this there were the demands made on his resources during special events like a royal birth, marriage or death. Each peasant family also had to provide one adult male for Begar for six months every year.⁸ To the British, as well as many modern observers, this seemed a very cumbersome (and economically discouraging) revenue demand, much in need of reforms and streamlining.⁹ This is precisely what the British attempted to do in the early 1850s and failed for reasons that will become apparent in the course of this chapter. On the basis of the arguments advanced in the second chapter, it is possible for us to notice in the political and fiscal arrangements of the Bushahr state the embodiment of the struggle between the emerging State and the earlier political structures for dominance. The *Wazeers* and other hereditary officers represented a ruling class within the local areas and clans, who had historically been subdued by the Raja, but whose power had not totally been destroyed.¹⁰ They in turn had not been able to fully overcome the

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6. G.C. Barnes, *Memorandum on the District of Bussahir; and the Pacification of the Disaffected Portion of its Inhabitants*, Selections from the records of the Punjab Government, Vol. V, No. 4, 1859–60, (henceforth *Memorandum*) pp. 83–86. Also, Bushahr, 1910, pg. 66.
 7. *Ibid.*, pg. 67.
 8. *Ibid.*, pg. 71.
 9. Mansookh Das, the Regent appointed during the minority of Raja Shamshere Singh, is reported by the Superintendent of Hill States as desiring "... a Revenue Settlement ... on the same principles as in the Government Hill Districts." *Foreign Department, Political Branch*, 13th June 1851, Nos. 47–50, 'Maladministration of Bussahir'.
 10. The best documentation of the struggle between the different political centres in Bushahr is available in H.W. Emerson, *Anthropological Study of Mandi and Bashahr*, Unpublished Typescript, MSS. EUR. No. 0321,

power of the village and clan institutions of the peasantry. Political power in Bushahr, as in most States in the Sutlej valley, was a compromise between the Raja, the important deities and the leaders of earlier political formations who were now high political administrators. The British did not realise this when they intervened to streamline the revenue administration of the State.

The British involvement with Bushahr began much earlier than in most other States of the Himalayan region that came under their paramountcy in 1816. This was so because it was the most important hill state on the river Sutlej and straddled the passes into Tibet that went through the valley of this river. The first survey of Bushahr territory was conducted within three years of gaining control. After that this State again came into prominence since it formed the frontier with the expanding armies of the Khalsa under Zorawar Singh who captured Ladakh and large parts of Tibet in the 1830s. Initial predatory raids into Bushahr territory too were made at this time and its traditional trade with Tibet and Ladakh was disrupted by the Sikh army. This alerted the British to the possibility of the Sikh army flanking their dominions from the North and Northeast of Bushahr. To know more about the geo-politics of the region and the nature of threat to British interests from beyond the Himalayas, Captain Cunningham was sent to gather information and establish contact with the generals of the Sikh army to warn them against encroaching on the territory under British protection. While Captain Cunningham was partly successful in his military mission, his main contribution was to bring to light the nature of the trans-Himalayan trade and the relations of the different political powers in the region.¹¹

Even though the Sikh threat passed away in a few years, the strategic importance of the Sutlej as a gateway into Tibet was not lost on the policy makers in Calcutta or London. Lord Dalhousie personally intervened to start work on a road, which would connect

OIOC, Chapters III, XII, XIV. A study of the political arrangements in the neighbouring State of Jubbal also substantiates this contention, see *Correspondence Relating to Jubbal Affairs, 1833–1857*, H.P. Secretariat Library, Simla, (private collection of Mian Goverdhan Singh).

11. These points have been discussed at some length in Chapter Three, sections titled 'Reasons Behind the Conquest of the Western Himalayas' and 'Stabilisation of British Rule'.

the plains of Punjab to the borders of Tibet, passing through the town of Simla which was becoming increasingly important in that period.¹² This road was constructed along the ridge of the watershed of the Sutlej and the Tons rivers and often used the valley of the Sutlej to make its way through the mountain barriers. Even before this road was constructed, many British travellers, both official and unofficial, travelled into Bushahr, specially its northern province of Kinnaur. Labour was requisitioned for carrying the baggage of the British, specially since most of the tracks in the interior areas did not even allow the passage of mules. In regions which were sparsely populated with scattered settlements distant from each other, the requisitioning of labour every summer, proved irksome for the villagers and difficult for the British.

It was during a trip of the Governor-General to Kinnaur that the first incipient rebellion against British requisitions for labour took place, leaving the Governor-General stranded in a lonely and uninhabited place called Trandee.¹³ Bushahr was at that time administered by a Regent appointed by the British, since the *Raja* was a minor. This Regent was one of the three *Wazeers* called Mansookh Das¹⁴. He had been appointed in 1850 to this post when Shamshere Singh, aged 11, succeeded to the throne. The claims of the Queen mother for Regency were ignored, and *Wazeer* Mansookh Das was made the single authority under which the entire administration functioned. This arrangement was not acceptable to the other functionaries of the State like the two other *Wazeers* and the Queen mother. They complained against it to the British and were sullen in accepting his authority. It became impossible for Mansookh Das to demand proper accounts from the other *Wazeers* and enforce orders in the pargana historically held by them.¹⁵ It was in this context that

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12. Capt. D. Briggs, *Report on the Operations Connected with the Hindostan and Thibet Road, from 1850–55*, Selections from the Records of the Government of India (PWD), No. XVI, 1856, OIOC, pg. 1.
 13. *Foreign Department, Political Branch*, op.cit., Letter No. 128, from Superintendent, Hill States, to Secretary to the Board of Administration, Lahore, dated Simla, 26th March 1851.
 14. *Ibid.*; also see *Bushahr, 1910*, pp. 10–11.
 15. 'His (Mansookh Das') authority is not respected by anyone apart from his own followers. ...each Vizier ruling over the tract subordinate to his

the Governor-General got stranded in Trandee, highlighting the crisis in the administration of Bushahr. The Superintendent of Hill States put the blame on the inability of Mansookh Das and the intrigue of the Queen mother and the other Wazeers. The newly appointed Board of Administration of Punjab put the blame on the inability of the Superintendent to control and supervise the affairs of Bushahr, and the Governor-General put the blame on the ‘imbecile’ Regent and the ‘rude’ character of the people of Bushahr. All of them agreed that the root of all problems was the cumbersome system of administration that had traditionally prevailed in Bushahr with State authority dispersed among various institutions and individuals. The multiplicity of demands by the State, mostly in kind, and the diffusion of responsibility of collecting and spending the dues among a wide range of State officials represented to the British both the cause and symptom of the recurrent ‘mal-administration’ in Bushahr.

To remedy this situation, settle revenue and other fiscal matters and reorganise administration along lines where responsibility was clearly defined among State officials, the British, under direct orders of Lord Dalhousie, deputed one Sham Lal to settle the revenues of the Hill State of Bushahr in 1851. He was also made the Manager of Bushahr, under orders of the Superintendent of hill states.¹⁶ His settlement, completed in 1852, radically overturned some of the most important of the revenue practices of the State on which were based the political systems and the agricultural economy of the villages. The single most important change effected by Sham Lal was the conversion to cash of both the assessment and collection of the entire revenue demand.¹⁷ He made enquiries about the nature of the different imposts

hereditary authority.’ *Foreign Department, Political Branch*, op.cit., Letter No. 190, from Superintendent, Hill States, to Secretary to the Board of Administration, Lahore, dated Simla, 3rd June 1850. In his minute to the proceedings, the Governor-General notes about Mansookh Das, ‘... he was utterly incapable of enforcing obedience to the orders he issued.’ It should be kept in mind that this incident occurred in an area that fell outside his traditional Wazeer.

16. *Ibid.*; also see *Bushahr, 1910*, pg. 10.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 67–68; G.C. Barnes, *Memorandum*, pp. 91–92: ‘In 1851, the British Government, ..., had deputed an experienced Tehseeldar, by name Sham Lall, to make a Land Settlement in money, consolidating all the

and demands by the State on the peasants and calculated their cash value at the rates prevalent in Rampur, the only town in these parts of the Himalayas and the capital of Bushahr. This conversion of the revenue demand to cash was accompanied by a move to centralise its administration by gathering the different responsibilities and powers of the *Wazeers* and other officials into one authority. This reduction in the revenue powers of the local officials was accompanied by an attempt to formally reduce their political power by doing away with their juridical responsibilities. It was assumed that reducing the number of accounts and officials under whom revenue could be collected would reduce the possibility of over-assessment of the peasants and corruption by the officials.

While British reports claimed that this new revenue demand was much lighter than the total burden imposed by the myriad earlier demands throughout the year, it seems that both the peasants and the State's administration resented it. The former opposed it because there was a paucity of cash and, in any case, they were totally ignorant of the workings of cash land settlements. This led to a situation where, rather than the peasants being given relief due to lower assessment and lesser scope for official corruption, large scale embezzlement and over-assessment became the norm under the new rules.¹⁸ The most common refrain of the peasants was that they felt that they were being cheated. The officials of the State were unhappy over this new revenue administration because by reducing all the demands into cash and

miscellaneous imposts, and fixing upon each peasant a sum in cash, proportionate to his means and the extent and quality of his land. From that time, the revenue has been thoroughly disorganised.'

This was explained by the peasants themselves: 'Their [the rebellious peasants] statements were unanimous. They said that their country was wild and secluded. Except along the valley of the Sutlej; there was no traffic, and the substance of the people consisted of their crops and their flocks, which, owing to the want of markets, they could not readily convert into cash. Money was a scarce commodity, except along the line of trade, and their dealings among themselves were almost limited to exchange. In consequence of these incidents of their country, the Government revenue had always been levied partly in kind, and partly in cash. *They could easier pay a heavier revenue this way, than a light consolidated sum in money.*" [emphasis mine].

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 94–95, 99–102, 115–117.

changing the revenue rates, this settlement interfered with their control on local resources and its access by the *Raja*. This was, in other words, an attack on the functioning of the local political system on which their power was based.

This reluctance about the use of cash for assessing and collecting revenue led to a total disarray in the finances of the State. The peasants felt that their burden was much more than earlier and it impoverished them, while the State's finances too became unsettled. It also seems that their ignorance of cash and the workings of a cash economy enabled some of the officials to amass much money and property at the expense of both the peasants and the State. Opposition to this settlement grew till in 1857 large numbers of peasants came out against the working of Sham Lal's settlement.¹⁹ They petitioned the *Raja* and agitated with the *Wazeers* for a return to the earlier system of assessment and collection.

The following account of the course of the rebellion, taken from the report sent by G. C. Barnes, the Commissioner of Hill States, who was deputed to arbitrate between the warring parties and 'pacify the disaffected portions' of Bushahr's population, highlights graphically the nature of the peasant rebellion, or *Dumh*, in the Himalayas.²⁰

The "Doom" is the name given in Bussahir to any popular combination raised for the redressal of special grievances, or for enforcing claims to certain rights. It is an expression of popular feeling under great excitement, – a protest on the part of the people against certain acts of their rulers which have provoked general discontent. This is not the first "Doom" or rising which has occurred in Bussahir, and I find it not unusual, under pressing circumstances, even in other States. When some grievance has become intolerable, the people communicate with each other, and combine for a general demonstration. The malcontents leave their homes, and encamp on an open hillside. They seldom resort to violence, but collect together, and by neglecting their lands and thereby diminishing the revenue, oblige their rulers to pacify and disperse them. This "Doom" has now been ten months in the field. Their members have gradually increased, until, at last, almost the entire adult male population who could possibly be spared collected under the flag of the insurgents. Still, the

19. Most of the information about the actual proceedings of the rebellion is taken from G.C. Barnes, *Memorandum*. Other sources are separately acknowledged.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 87–90.

demonstration was disregarded. No advances were made, and no disposition shown to hear what they had to say. They were regarded as rebels in arms against constituted authority, and were threatened with coercion, if they did not disperse. Until the beginning of last month, the "Doom" maintained a passive attitude, relying apparently on their numbers and obstinacy for eventual justice. But, after that date, they were joined by Meean Futteh Sing, and commenced the offensive. The houses and property of those obnoxious to the people – individuals supposed to have prevented the redress of grievances, or to have enriched themselves at the people's expense, - were singled out for attack. The house of Purrus Ram Vakeel, against whom all the petitions presented to the Supreme and local Governments, were levelled, was razed to the ground, and his property given over to indiscriminate plunder. Other persons, four or five in number, were selected for a similar vengeance. Many excesses were committed, which have much aggravated the unhappy state of affairs, and are seriously to be deplored. These atrocities were partially retaliated, according to their means, by the "Dhaoo" or King's Party, and eventually actual collision occurred, which ended in three or four men being wounded on either side, but no lives were lost.

The "Dhaoo" or King's party consisted almost entirely of officials about the Raja, and their personal followers. There was little or none of the popular element in this faction. They were the Kardars who had become obnoxious to the people, on account of their rapacity and injustice. Their headquarters was in the pergunnah of Nawur, of which many of the leading officials were natives. Nawur, moreover, had been more or less conciliated, and the people there did not care to join the "Doom". They would be glad if the objects proposed by the "Doom" were carried to a successful issue, but they were not sufficiently interested to endure the hardships of a prolonged absence from home. The strength of the "Dhaoo" party was not in their numbers, (for they scarcely mustered 40 persons, exclusive of the peasantry of pergunnah Nawur) but, in the presence of the Raja, in the countenance of the Superintendent Hill States, and in the personal weight and influence attaching to each individual. On the one side, were masses of rude peasants, and on the other, almost all the local officials, with the Raja at their head. The "Dhaoo" always treated the undisciplined force of their opponents with contempt. They represented them as "Moofsids" or rebels, and looked forward rather confidently to the advent of a British force, which should reinstate their authority, and dissipate the popular uprising at the point of the bayonet. When, however, the "Doom" threw off their passiveness and assumed the offensive, the "Dhaoo" became really alarmed. The "Nawur" peasantry were called to arms, and on hearing of the destruction of Purrus Ram's house, they got the Raja to give an order (which he declares he signed under compulsion) to burn and plunder the entire village, containing the house of Jooalla Das,

the agent of the "Doom", who had gone to Allahabad and to Lahore, to petition the Governor General and the Lieutenant Governor. This man was the paid agent of the people. He was no criminal, and was absent in the execution of a duty confided to him by the popular leaders. Yet, not only his house and property but the houses of all those guilty of living in his neighbourhood were, - twelve in number, - burnt to the ground, and the property therein, plundered.

After these excesses on both sides, news arrived that the government, had deputised me to visit Bussahir, and to adopt measures for the pacification of the country. The Rajah at once deserted his officials, and went over to the popular side. He promised them full redress, and declared his entire sympathy with them. I have before adverted to the Raja's fickleness. Probably, seeing that the fortunes of the "Doom" were in the ascendant, he took the victorious side. At all events, I must do him the credit to state that, throughout my investigations, he consistently advocated the cause of the people, and abused his former friends' and advisors. Deserted by the Raja, and receiving news of my deputation, obviously on the petitions of the "Doom", which had been carried to the Governor General himself, the "Dhaoo" party lost heart, and fled precipitately. Some came to the British pergannah of Kot Khaee, others crossed the Sutlej into the Kooloo district, and the rest took refuge wherever an asylum offered.

Barnes set up his court at a place called Bagee where both the opposing parties and the *Raja* assembled to air their grievances and find a solution. His report contains long descriptions about the type of the peasant assembly, their manners, their way of camping in the open fields and forests during the course of the 'Doom' and their demands. He felt that it was necessary to ascertain the "real" demands of the peasants, from those that had been "imposed" on the *Dumh* by the rebel Wazeers and the Raja's half-brother, Mian Futteh Singh. This would not have been possible as long as they remained in one big rebellious mass of two thousand and more people. So he spent two days dividing the crowd of assembled peasants into groups according to their pargana and clan under the leadership of their respective headmen or other accredited officials.²¹ After this they were asked to come, one group at a time, and record their grievances. At the end of this exercise Barnes found a considerable unanimity in their demands which he classified into six headings. He was struck by the universal dislike that the British revenue settlement generated among both

21. *Ibid.*, pg. 91.

peasants and officials and that this was, perhaps, the main reason for these 'disturbances'.²²

The demands of the 'Doom', according to Barnes's estimate were,

1. A return to the ancient system of revenue assessment and collection.
2. A rigid scrutiny of the State accounts.
3. Surrender of those who had embezzled public revenue.
4. Selection of three *Wazeers*, who, with the Raja, would alone be responsible for the future government of the country.
5. 'Condign punishment' of Purrus Ram, Vakeel, for rapacity and corruption.
6. Exclusion of the Dowager Ranee from any concern with public finances.

After much examination of different people involved in the rebellion and officials involved in the administration of the State, Barnes came to the conclusion that the new system of revenue assessment and collection introduced by the British was unsuited to the conditions prevailing in Bushahr. For support to this contention he advanced three main reasons.²³ The first concerned the physical condition of the country and its backward agriculture. This has been discussed at length in the first and second chapters of this thesis. The second reason advanced was that the local economy had historically been cashless, there was the physical unavailability of money to pay revenue and most people were not conversant with cash transactions which made it easier for embezzlement and fraud. The third reason was that by changing the political system on which the revenue administration of the State was based – reducing the power of the traditional *Wazeers* and appointing outside revenue officials – this new system had caused chaos in the working of the entire administration. This created further openings for officials to misappropriate funds and overassess the peasantry. While commending the political objectives and fiscal principles of the British system, he decided to return to the earlier system of revenue assessment and collection, thus effectively acceding to the first and primary demand of the *Dumh*.

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 93.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 93–94.

Likewise, the peasants had success with their other demands – the scrutiny of accounts,²⁴ the selection of three *Wazeers*²⁵ who would be fully responsible for administration (thus doing away with the Vakeel, who was appointed as a consequence of the British settlement to oversee the finances)²⁶; and the exclusion of the Raja's mother who was reputed to interfere in the working of the administration.²⁷ The peasants' demand for punishment to Purrus Ram, the government appointed Vakeel, was overlooked since Barnes thought that by burning his house and looting all his possessions in the State, he had been given enough punishment. The Commissioner also refused to hand over those officials who were accused by the rebels of embezzling public funds to the 'Doom' but promised that those found guilty would be punished under the 'proper' laws; but he himself notes that with the 'chaos' of the new revenue system and the disturbances consequent to the 'Doom', it would be next to impossible to account for the finances and thus impossible to convict anyone.

While the main contention of Barnes was that the new system of land revenue had been the primary cause of the *Dumh*, he did not effect a complete reversal to earlier patterns. The collection of revenue was reverted to the traditionally accepted amounts in kind through the agency of the traditional *Wazeers*. But there were some major features of Sham Lal's settlement that were continued with. While the assessment and collection were retained in their earlier format, revenue records and settlement papers still carried their cash

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24. *Ibid.*, pp. 95–97, the peasants wanted Barnes to hand those officials against whom the peasant rebels had the greatest suspicion of embezzlement. His refusal to do so almost brought the situation to a point where he feared violent reactions from the rebels who wanted to directly kill them. It was only after the threat of military action by Capt. Younghusband's detachment across the Sutlej, and assurances of fair trial of the accused, that the situation was 'retrieved'.
 25. *Ibid.*, pp. 98–99. The three new *Wazeers* who were appointed were Bishn Doss for Shooa, Doorganund for Kool, and Futtah Ram for Poaree. The three *Wazeers* who were with the 'Dhaoo' or king's party were excluded, including Surjeet, the son of Mansookh Doss.
 26. *Ibid.*, pp. 99–102. Barnes lists the many cases of embezzlement, bribery and abuse of political power against Purrus Ram, the Vakeel, and says categorically that he was the main provocation for the rebellion.
 27. *Ibid.*, pp. 102–103.

equivalents. Further, these different collections were tabulated and each peasant was provided a *Poorzee* or piece of paper on which were written his dues to the State, both the regular ones and those which were expected on special occasions.²⁸ The demands listed on this *Poorzee* were attested by the various state officials and the British, and could not be changed without a proper settlement of all land rights. It was left to the individual to decide on his method of payment, the traditional system of a combination of kind and cash or only cash. It was also now possible for peasants' families to pay some dues in the traditional system and some under the new cash system. Barnes was confident that with the extension of the 'civilising influence' of British rule, the cash component of the collection would increase.²⁹ But no scope was left for annual variations in the demand, and thus the leeway enjoyed by the different political institutions in negotiating surplus appropriation was lost.

Each *Wazeer* was made fully responsible for revenue collection in his region and no other government official could interfere with his work or collect any dues from the peasants for any purpose.³⁰ With the exact tabulation of the amount that each peasant owed the State, it was still possible for Barnes to calculate the amount that each *Wazeer* would normally collect in his region even within the traditional format. This led to the fixation of the amount that each *Wazeer* had to deposit into the State's treasury at different times of the year. On the basis of this stabilisation of revenue collection, a register was maintained to keep an account of the deposits that were made at the Rampur treasury and the withdrawals that were done. Even for withdrawals from the treasury it became necessary for the *Wazeers* to get signatures of the concerned officials and the Raja. An assessment was also made of the expenses of the Raja's household and of the State, and over-expenditure invited queries from the Commissioner of the Hill States. It is thus evident that while retaining much of the earlier system, much of the change introduced by Sham Lal's settlement was retained. The reversal was more to do with the continuance of the

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 122–123.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 112–113.

earlier personnel and political structures in working a revenue administration which was radically new.

These changes and what their implication was for land relations and the region's social formation need to be noted. The first point to note is that there was now in place a fixed rate of assessment. Even though it was kept at the level of earlier demands and the collection, in cash or kind or a combination of both, was according to the convenience of the peasant, the settlement papers and the *Poorzee* given to the peasants contained the cash amount of the demand along with the amount in kind. Not only did this give a cash basis to the demand, it opened up the possibility of future payments in cash, which was also noted by Barnes. The tabulation of the different dues of the peasants and its record in the settlement papers and the *Poorzees* meant that these had now been fixed and it ceased to be an area of political contention between the different political interests in the region. All future redressal of disputes regarding the working of the revenue administration had to be on the basis of these recorded rights, and more importantly, through the medium of a British-monitored administration. From being a site being the struggle between the different political powers in the Himalayas, revenue assessment and collection became merely an administrative job without political overtones. Under cover of reverting to the traditional forms of administration, Barnes institutionalised fundamental changes in the polity and economy of Bushahr under the veneer of continuity. Moreover, the manner and nature of British intervention, the very need for it, established once and for all the centrality of British control over the politics of the region, which was till then not very apparent to the local population. After this a series of rebellions, crisis and collapse of administration at different times and in different places merely underlined this fundamental fact.

Suket Rebellion and Deposition of the Raja, 1877–78

Suket State lies on the banks of the Sutlej river, and except for a small tract on the Suketi river, the entire state is drained by the Sutlej or its tributaries.³¹ It was one of the early states to emerge in the Western

31. *Gazetteer of the Suket State, 1927*, reprinted New Delhi, 1997,(henceforth *Suket, 1927*) pg. 1.

Himalayas, and the ruling dynasty traced its origin to the Sena dynasty of Gaur, or medieval Bengal. Mandi, its neighbour to the west, was once part of it till a quarrel among brothers resulted in the break up of Suket.³² At the time of the British conquest Suket was composed of two distinct geographical and cultural zones, the fertile valley named Balh, and the mountainous tracts to its north bordering Kullu and Mandi known as the Pahari Tehsils.³³ This part of the State was sparsely populated, with poor communication and low agricultural surplus.³⁴ On the other hand, the Balh area was agriculturally rich, its well-irrigated plains yielding two crops annually, it was relatively densely populated and the *Durbar* of the *Raja* was situated here. With the coming of the British the relative importance of Balh increased since the new Simla-Mandi-Kangra road passed through it.³⁵ A massive rebellion swept the State at the end of 1877 and beginning of 1878, which led to the deposition of the *Raja*. It highlights the manner of British intervention into the political arrangements inside the Hill States, and the consequences of this on the nature of kingship and the resolution of political crisis.

Raja Ugar Sen ruled Suket when it came under British Paramountcy. Ugar Sen had ascended the throne in 1838 and seen off the difficult years of Sikh occupation without much harm to his authority or territory, while the Mandi *Raja* was taken prisoner and Kullu was overrun.³⁶ His problems were more to do with relations with his heir apparent, Tika Ruder Sen, who distrusted his father's motives, feared that his brothers from Ugar Sen's other wives would deprive him of his throne and generally tried to control the State's

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 10–11, 19.

33. *Ibid.*, pg. 1.

34. *Foreign Department, Political Branch-A*, May 1878, Nos. 312–320. *Report on Sooket Insurrection*, from A. Brandreth, Commissioner and Superintendent, Jullundur Division, to L.H. Griffin, Officiating Secretary to the Government of Punjab, dated Hatti, Mandi State, 24th January 1878, (henceforth *Report on Sooket Affairs*). Almost all the information about this rebellion is contained in this document and the document cited in footnote 38.

35. *Suket*, 1927, pg. 90.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 31–34.

administration by placing his confidants in important positions.³⁷ This led to frequent friction between the father and son, the son allegedly fermenting dissatisfaction among the subjects and conspiring with state officials to remove his father from the throne. The disputes between the father and son were never allowed by the British to unsettle matters beyond a point, and all of the heir's attempts at usurping the throne were unsuccessful. British sanction was needed to ascend the throne and this was not given to Ruder Sen. Finally, out of desperation he exiled himself from Suket and lived in British territory for more than twenty-five years.³⁸ Later when Ugar Sen died, he was appointed *Raja* in 1876 under orders from the Punjab Government. He returned bitter to a throne that he considered he had been denied wrongfully for too long. While in exile he had keenly followed events inside Suket and given his support and promise of help to every official or peasant who came to him with complaints against his father. The Commissioner in Jullundhar, under whose charge Suket fell, considered him a 'centre of intrigue' in the politics of Suket.³⁹

The new enthroned Raja of Suket refused to follow any of the rules and customs that dictate practice at the death of one's father. While the entire male population of Suket shaved their hair as a mark of respect for their departed king, he refused to do so and was reported to have eaten meat within a few days of his father's death.⁴⁰ His first action as Raja was to dismiss almost all the officials of the State who had been appointed during his father's reign and remove his brothers from all positions of authority that they held. He appointed a man called Ram Ditta Mal as the *Wazeer* of Suket and handed over all administrative charge to him as payment for debts that he had taken during the long years of his exile⁴¹. Ram Ditta Mal was to assess and

37. *Ibid.*, Also see *Report on Sookeit Affairs*, op.cit., for details of these tensions between father and son which had a direct bearing on the rebellion under discussion.

38. *Foreign Department, Political Branch-A*, May 1878, Nos. 312–320, *Keepwiths*, Note signed H.M.D. dated 20-2-1878. (henceforth *Keepwiths*)

39. *Report on Sookeit Affairs*.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Keepwiths*.

collect all the revenue and other cesses of the State and pay a certain amount to the *Raja* for his maintenance. The new *Wazeer* was a notorious embezzler of funds and had been imprisoned by Kapurthala State for defrauding it of a few thousand rupees, some months before his appointment in Suket.⁴² He appointed his relatives and friends, residents of the Punjab plains like him, to various official positions in Suket, so much so that Suket subjects held very few government positions when the rebellion occurred.⁴³ Ruder Sen was angry at the State officials who served under his father and the other subjects since he thought that they had not done enough to support him during his disputes with his father. He also felt bitter that the British did not side with him in his disputes with his father, and suppressed all his attempts to claim the throne. The fact that he was made to sit out twenty five years in exile while his father ruled under British patronage gave him the impression that they would not allow an enthroned ruler to be removed, whatever the pressures that may be brought on to them.⁴⁴ This bitterness at past injustice by all and sundry, and a sense of security at British protection of his rule made him disdainful of local complaints and petitions for redress brought to him by his subjects.

Ram Ditta Mal, it would appear from the sources, behaved like a Mughal *Ijaradar*, or rent contractor.⁴⁵ Revenue was charged at higher than the norm rates. Traditionally, the mountainous areas had paid very light revenue since they grew little surplus and instead of this they were conscripted to fight and defend the State's borders. With the establishment of British rule, the need for constant vigil on the borders or troops for skirmishes was greatly reduced to the point that it vanished. This led to a growth in the revenue demand on the villagers of the mountainous tracts, which they found difficult to meet

42. *Foreign Department, Political Branch-A*, op.cit. Letter No. 212, from L.H. Griffin, Officiating Secretary to the Government of Punjab, to C.U. Aitchison, Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, dated, 11th February, 1878, marked 'Confidential'.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Keepwiths*. Note signed C.U.A. (Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department) dated 9-3-1878.

45. *Report on Sookeit Affairs*.

due to the nature of mountainous agriculture and the absence of markets where they could convert their non-agricultural wealth into cash. Ram Ditta Mal assessed their revenue at rates similar to those paid by the agriculturists in Balh, and this demand was collected with a bi-annual regularity, which was historically unprecedented in the region. Moreover, the personnel of the administration imposing these new rules and collecting these new rates of revenue were equally alien to the region. No leniency or remission was allowed to the peasants even for bad harvests or other calamities.

Petitions and complaints to the *Raja* elicited a sullen response and all petitioners were referred to Ram Ditta Mal, who treated them with great severity and cruelty for protesting against his measures and 'his men'. During investigations connected with the rebellion, the British found an embarrassingly large number of people in the State jail on charges which were so flimsy that even the Governor-General remarked on it.⁴⁶ Further measures were taken to ensure full collection of revenue, one such measure being to impose a fine of two annas to the rupee if there was a delay of more than two weeks in fulfilling the demand, whether of cash or kind or labour. This measure was also intended for conscripting labour for forest and Begar, wages for which were reduced leading to a reduced supply of voluntary labour. When petitions to the *Raja* failed, people approached the Commissioner of Jullandhar who had charge of Suket affairs. But since these petitions were mostly signed and sent by the dismissed officials and disgraced relatives of the new *Raja*, perhaps the only people who were literate, not much attention was given to them and they were assumed to be normal attempts to regain lost positions.⁴⁷

The rebellion was triggered by summons sent to nearly sixty peasant families to send one representative each to *Baned*, the court

46. *Ibid.* Many of those in prison were relatives, often female, of those against whom Ram Ditta Mal wanted to press charges. Since the accused could not be arrested some near relative was taken into custody, a practice which was looked at with special disfavour by the British officials commenting in the *Keepwiths*.

47. *Keepwiths*. Much criticism of the Commissioner about his lack of judgement about assessing the validity of these petitions is voiced by almost all the officials of the Government of India who commented on the *Report on Sookeit Affairs*.

of the Raja, on Royal attendance under penalty of fine. The peasants suspected that they were being called to be punished for earlier representations against the tyranny of Ram Ditta Mal. The preceding autumn harvest had been bad but the state officials were collecting revenue at full rates. This order coincided with an incident where one of Ram Ditta Mal's newly appointed Tehsildar, a man forbidden British government employ for past misconduct, abducted the wife of a peasant and returned her 'disgraced' the next day. Cases of sexual abuse and rape by State officials were not as common in the Western Himalayas as in many other Princely States of British India. It seems that many of the complaints by the peasantry, specially of the Pahari Tehsils, related to sexual abuse and rape of their women by these new officers who were imported by Ram Ditta Mal from Punjab.

A meeting of representatives of the families summoned by the Royal order was held to discuss measures to protect themselves from the Raja's and Ram Ditta Mal's wrath. It was decided that apart from the men summoned, one representative from each family in the affected clans would accompany them to Baned and represent their case in the Durbar. It was while this meeting was in progress that news of the abduction and rape of one of their women came. The emerging mood of the peasants, by this time, was one of rebelliousness against the administration of Ram Ditta Mal and his associates, who symbolised to them tyrannical officers corrupting the rule of a godly Raja. Apart from the leaders of the different clans and families represented in the meeting, an important mobiliser of peasant opinion was a person named 'Ditto' in the records, a former servant of Sir Edward Bayley, a British official at Simla.

While the party of those who had been summoned and those who had been elected to accompany them was collecting, news reached them that an armed force had been dispatched from Baned to their area as news of their congregation and meetings had reached Ram Ditta Mal and he wanted to make an example of the men who had been summoned. This information and the news of the woman's abduction 'fired the train'. The peasantry 'rose on all sides' and all outsiders, especially those connected with administration, were seized and imprisoned. A body of five to six thousand men was soon marching to *Baned* to place their case at the Durbar of the Raja. Ram Ditta Mal fled Suket and the Raja armed his officials and guard,

composed mainly of the ‘outsiders’, with orders to fire on the approaching peasantry. By this time news reached British officials stationed outside Suket who prohibited the Raja from firing. The Commissioner hastened from Jullundhar and armed levies, accompanied by their Rajas, came from Mandi, Bilaspur and Nadaon to help him put down the rebellion and secure ‘order’ in the State.

Even so, the combined armed force felt vulnerable at the anger of the peasants assembled in *Baned*. The rebel peasants had sealed the Suket borders to intercept any of Ram Ditta Mal’s men or messages sent by him. It was only when they satisfied themselves of the bonafides of the British officials that they allowed them to enter the State, because they wanted the *gora lok* to help their *Raja* end the tyranny in Suket. The State armoury as well as all the administrative buildings, including prisons, were under the control of the rebel peasants. There had been no violence beyond some beatings and imprisonment of those Suket officials who were identified with Ram Ditta Mal. According to the British records, even though the rebels entered the absconding *Wazeer*’s house, they ‘merely’ dragged out his wife and child and deprived them of the jewellery on their bodies which they claimed was part of the Suket treasures that he had embezzled. The Raja had, in the meantime, locked himself inside his palace, refusing to grant the rebel peasants the interview they craved. For two days a tense eyeball to eyeball confrontation continued. The rebel leaders took the administration in hand. They organised groups to ‘guard’ the treasury, the armoury, the markets and the prisoners they had taken. But no case of instant justice for the despised prisoners is reported in the British sources. The subjects of Suket, peasants and nobles, were waiting for the British to come and sort out matters.

The first step that the Commissioner of Jullundhar took on reaching Suket was to seize the armoury from the peasant guards and seek the surrender of the principal rebel leaders. Both these objects were quite easily accomplished as the rebels voluntarily gave themselves up to the pacifying force whom they considered their saviour. The Raja of Suket refused to come out of his palace and co-operate with this ‘pacification’ since he considered his honour ‘imperfectly upheld’. Finally, the Commissioner, exercising his powers as the representative of the British Government, organised a court with himself as the judge and the Rajas of Mandi and Nadaon as assessors. The Suket *Raja*

attended this Court for the initial few days but again retreated into his palace when he found that the punishment meted out to the rebels was too lenient.⁴⁸ He desired capital punishment for the rebel leaders and long imprisonment of all the other participants. The commissioner's court sentenced Ditto, the main instigator, to five years imprisonment and the rest were given lesser sentences. The entire area that had rebelled was fined Rs 10,000, which was to be collected in two instalments with their revenue.⁴⁹ This money was to be spent on the construction of a mule road, which would improve communication with the inaccessible mountainous areas and help penetrate the market, the lack of these two being held as the primary causes for the rebellion.

The *Raja* of Suket left his kingdom because he felt that with such light sentences his honour, status and prestige among his subjects had suffered an irreparable loss, and it was not possible for him to rule over such disloyal and rebellious people. His main grouse, as evident in the British sources, was that he was not allowed to deal with his subjects as he wished, and also strictures were passed on the manner in which he carried out his administration with the help of Ram Ditta Mal. Ruder Sen felt that if a *Raja*'s relation with his subjects was to be decided by somebody outside the equation, then the honour of the *Raja* was compromised. Even an uninhibited display of loyalty and allegiance by his subjects, as happened when he finally emerged from his palace to attend the commissioner's court to try the rebel leaders, and the very rebel leaders claims to have acted only to release him

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48. The Lt. Governor of Punjab, though he had no sympathy for the Suket *Raja*, also considered that the punishment given to the rebels was too lenient. See *Foreign Department, Political Branch-A*, op.cit. Letter No. 212, from L.H. Griffin, Officiating Secretary to the Government of Punjab, to C.U. Aitchison, Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, dated, 11th February 1878, marked 'Confidential'.
 49. Officers of the Government of India, and also the Viceroy considered that the Commissioner had been much too severe on the peasant rebels, 'who in similar conditions in Europe would be considered heroes'. Orders were passed that these sentences should be reduced through the medium of an amnesty which the newly enthroned *Raja* could be persuaded to grant at his accession. No record exists about the status of the fine. Keepwiths, Note signed C.U.A., op.cit., and note signed Lytton, dated 11-3-1878.

from the clutches of Ram Ditta Mal who they alleged was ruining them and embezzling the State treasury, did not mollify the Raja. He could not tolerate any external interference into the affairs of his State and into the manner in which he related to his subjects.

The British could not accept this. The State of Suket was a feudatory of the British Crown and no social disturbance or ‘maladministration’ could be tolerated, beyond what they termed as natural to a native State. The first indications of unrest and disruption in the administration led to British enquiries and when the situation went out of control, there was swift and uninhibited intervention by the Commissioner. It is interesting to note that while the peasants of the State, specially in the inaccessible mountainous interiors where the main focus of the rebellion lay, realised the central role of the British in the affairs of Suket, the Raja was either unwilling to grant them this measure of control over his domain or was innocent of the changes in the nature of the Hill State that had come about as a consequence of British *paramountcy*.

This realisation of changed power equations in the region meant that the peasant rebels got a relatively fair deal, with Ram Ditta Mal, being dismissed, the *Raja* being deposed and later even the sentences given by the Commissioner being reduced to a few months by the Governor-General himself.

This case of Suket is interesting since it is perhaps the only case where the Raja of a Hill State was deposed because of his inability to fully understand or accept the changed political reality of the Western Himalayas. While he realised that he was no longer dependent on political processes local to Suket to remain in power, he underestimated the protection that British Paramountcy gave him. Certain rules and limits of governance had been laid down, through the terms of the Sanads and its later interpretations in various government documents, which had to be followed. While it definitely strengthened the position of the Raja vis-à-vis his subjects, it also enabled the latter to challenge him to a higher authority on the basis of clearly laid out principles and rules. One may perhaps call it a precursor to the rule of law. While this contention may be open to contestation, what was unambiguously demonstrated by the Suket rebellion was the radical curtailment of arbitrary power exercised by local political institutions by fixed rules laid down by the British.

The Suket rebellion of 1878 was perhaps the last major uprising of the region's peasantry where they were able to convince the British about the genuineness of their demands and the reasons for their actions. By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the traditional weapon of the *Dumh*, which had been the favoured method of the Himalayan peasantry for expressing its discontent, began to invite stronger and more severe response leading to a failure to get redress. The next section will deal with the most important of these incidents, the massive rebellion in Mandi in the year 1909.

Mandi Rebellions of 1871 and 1909

The Hill State of Mandi lay mostly along the basin of the Beas river, its north-eastern boundary beginning where this river comes out of the Kullu valley and its southern limit marked by the ranges of the Siwaliks.⁵⁰ Most of its northern boundary was formed by the peaks of the Dhauladhar range, which have few passes to allow travel. In area it was approximately twelve hundred square miles.

The territory of Mandi can be divided into three broad zones based on ecological criteria.⁵¹ The most fertile and populated tract is that which falls in the main Beas valley, with the town of Mandi as its centre. This region is agriculturally the richest part of the State since the low altitudes of the Beas valley enable two harvests in almost all parts. Moreover, the traditional trade routes and some important grazing runs passed through it making it possible for its inhabitants to enter into other non-agricultural activities with profit. Towards the southwest of the State lies the tract identified by its main settlement, Sarkaghat. This area can topographically be classified with the Siwaliks, but its climate is dry and the agriculture poor. In the north-eastern corner of Mandi lay the area called Saraj, the main part of which lay in the British territory of Kullu. Saraj was an area of high mountains, small, rocky streams, steep gradients and therefore, poor agriculture. Pastoralism formed an important part of the local economy and the settlements were much scattered. Much of the timber

50. *Gazetteer of the Mandi State, 1920*, Lahore, 1922, (henceforth *Mandi, 1920*)
pg. 1.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-6.

of Mandi came from this part of the State and it played an important part in the later years.

Salt, iron and trade formed important aspects of the Mandi State's economy.⁵² The salt mines at Gumma and Drang produced rock salt, which was exported to Kangra, Kullu and eastwards to the Sutlej and Tons valleys.⁵³ The iron produced was of an inferior quality and supplied only a part of the local domestic and agricultural demand.

Mandi, as has been noted in the previous section, was a State that emerged out of the partition of Suket. It consolidated itself in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when its territorial limits stabilised and it emerged as a bigger, richer and more strategically placed Hill State than Suket. It was overrun by the Sikh army which entered the Western Himalayas in pursuit of the Gurkhas retreating from their siege of Kangra fort in the first decade of the nineteenth century.⁵⁴ From Mandi, the Sikh army went further into Kullu and Mandi became an important centre for their control of the Beas valley. Its strategic importance and the independent spirit of its ruler led to his arrest and deportation to Lahore for quite some years.⁵⁵ It also became important to British military calculations. Direct communications were established between the Mandi Durbar and the British political agents prior to 1846 when it was taken under the Paramountcy of the British Crown along with Suket.⁵⁶ The Sanad that was granted to the Mandi Raja was similar to the ones given to the Simla Hill States in 1815–16.⁵⁷ While granting independence to the Raja in internal administration, it reduced his powers to one of a 'limited' monarch who was accountable to the British Government, or more specifically to its agent in the form of the Commissioner of Jullundhar. The British confirmed the claim of the Raja to the throne but every succession had to be confirmed by them before the incumbent could exercise his powers.

52. Manmohan, *History of the Mandi State*, Lahore, 1930, pg. 5.

53. *Foreign Department, Political Branch-A*, March 1871, Nos. 595–602,
Arrangements with Raja of Mundi for the Sale of Mundi Salt.

54. Manmohan, op.cit., pp. 84–85. This happened in 1809.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 105–108.

56. *Ibid.*, pp. 111–112.

57. *Ibid.*, pp. 113–114, the entire text of the Sanad is given.

The administrative organisation of Mandi was similar to most of the larger Hill States, only more developed. The Raja was not only the de facto secular ruler but also, more importantly, the vice-regent of *Madho Rao*, the incarnation of Vishnu, who was the legal ruler of the State. All the other territorial and clan deities accepted Madho Rao's suzerainty over them, which was also exhibited during the major festivals when they came to give personal homage to him. Many of these smaller divinities, which gave homage to Madho Rao were themselves divine rulers of their territory or clan, which they too exercised through some human representative called *Ranas* and *Thakurs*. This sacral overlordship of *Madho Rao* over the other deities was central to the constitution of kingship.⁵⁸ The legitimacy of the Raja and the Mandi State derived from its being an expression of the divine will of Madho Rao. In secular affairs, the *Wazeer* was the most important officer of the State who looked after the entire administration. The different territorial parts of the kingdom were under the charge of *Ahlkars*, who worked under the *Wazeer*. Separate officers manned the treasury, jail and there was also a small standing army.

With the coming of the British no major change was effected in the structure of the administration. The Sikhs had taken two lakh fifty thousand rupees as tribute every year,⁵⁹ which had emptied the State treasury and also affected the local economy of the villages, which were often raided by the invading army for supplies. The British only took one lakh 'Company' rupees as tribute every year and a promise from the Raja of 'good and peaceful administration'.⁶⁰ But very soon they needed to intervene into the internal administration of the State.

In 1851, five years after Mandi came under British Paramountcy, Raja Balbir Sen died, leaving a minor of four years as the heir or *Tika*, as is known in the region. His mother, tried to take control of the State during his minority, and even attempted a coup against *Wazeer* Goshaon, who was in control of the administration.⁶¹ This attempt

58. *Mandi, 1920*, pp. 61–63.

59. Manmohan, op.cit. pg. 109, claims that the demand often crossed rupees four lakhs as annual tribute, a sum entirely out of the possibility of the Mandi Rajas to pay.

60. *Arrangements with Raja of Mundi for the Sale of Mundi Salt*.

61. Manmohan, op.cit., pg. 118.

failed since the British favoured the continuation of *Wazeer* Goshaon, who was now made the head of a regency council, which also included the chief *Purohit* and the deceased king's half-brother, Mian Bhag Singh. There was little co-ordination or trust between these three and finally, the British had to rearrange the administrative structure and responsibilities were clearly demarcated between these three.⁶² Some years later, in 1863 the *Purohit* was dismissed from his charge of educating the *Tika*, fined Rs 2,000 for neglect of his duties and banished from the capital. A British officer of the education department, Mr. Clarke, was appointed the Raja's tutor.⁶³ In 1866, when the *Tika* was invested with full powers as Raja Bijai Sen, Mr. Clarke was appointed as his councillor, Goshaon being retained as councillor to the Raja.⁶⁴ Thus, in less than two decades of British Paramountcy they had enthroned one minor *Raja*, decided on the winning side in a palace coup, thrice changed the administrative structure, dismissed the chief *Purohit* of the State, and suspended the institution of *Wazeer* by appointing two councillors, one of them a British official.

Intrigues and factionalism divided this small cabinet and Mr. Clarke, who was earlier Goshaon's confidant, became the Raja's man, sending adverse reports about Goshaon's conspiracies to the Commissioner at Jullundhar. In early 1870, the Raja, Mr. Clarke and the Raja's uncle, Mian Bhag Singh formed a committee to consider whether the Raja should accept the orders of the Commissioner or should he consider himself subservient only to the Supreme Government and not any of its lowly officials⁶⁵. The Punjab Government took serious exception to this and after a series of enquiries and correspondence between the Commissioner, the Secretary to the Lieutenant Governor and the Government of India, it was decided to remove Mr. Clarke and appoint an official of the Bengal Civil Service, whose powers and responsibilities were also

62. *Ibid.*, pg. 119.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Foreign Department, Political Branch-A*, September 1870, Nos. 35–39, *Affairs of the Mandi State*.

65. *Ibid.* Letter No. 188–1186, From H.W.H. Coxe, Officiating Commissioner and Superintendent, Jullundhur Division, to T.H. Thorton, Secretary to Government, Punjab, dated 25th April 1870.

clearly spelt out.⁶⁶ He was the person charged with reforming the State's administration, 'removing the Bengali Baboos' who had come to occupy some of the important posts in Mandi during the tenure of Mr. Clarke, and improve the finances which were in a 'total confusion'. While the *Raja* remained the legal ruler, power was now vested with Mr. E. Harrison who was sent with this heavy mandate to Mandi. The first sign of popular resentment at the intrusion of British officials into the State affairs and administration was demonstrated a few months after Mr. Harrison took charge.

In August of 1870, the British Government felt that the sale of 'untaxed' Mandi salt in territories under their direct administration was leading to a loss of revenue. The Mandi authorities argued that Mandi paid a very high tribute to the British precisely because of the revenues it generated out of the sale of this salt.⁶⁷ The initial political and financial settlement of affairs, completed at the time of the granting of the Sanad in 1846, included the sale of salt in its calculation of Mandi revenue. Therefore, they claimed that further interference was uncalled for, and was an affront to the authority and prestige of the Raja among his subjects. These arguments were overruled and the Financial Commissioner of Punjab sent his men to take charge of the salt mines at Gumma and Drang.

The most important changes that were introduced by the new Superintendent of Mandi Salt Mines, related to the traditional patterns of exchange and barter through which this salt was distributed, specially among the subjects of the State.⁶⁸ No salt was henceforth to be supplied in lieu of grain or *ghee*, and no salt could be procured on

66. *Ibid.* Also see Letter No. 610, From T.H. Thorton, Secretary to Government, Punjab, to H.W.H. Coxe, Officiating Commissioner and Superintendent, Jullundhur Division, dated 25th May 1870; and Letter No. 1568P, From C.U. Aitchison, Secretary to Government of India, Foreign Department, to T.H. Thorton, Secretary to Government, Punjab, dated 2nd September, 1870.

67. Mandi paid 30% of its annual revenue as tribute while the corresponding figures for Suket and Kapoorthala were 17% and 18% respectively. *Arrangements with Raja of Mundi for the Sale of Mundi Salt*.

68. *Ibid.* Letter No. 10, From Councillor of Mandi, to Lt. Col. T.W. Mercer, Officiating Commissioner and Superintendent, Jullundhur Division, dated 2nd February 1871.

orders of either the State treasury or the *Zakat-Khana*. The system of procuring a days labour from purchasers per mule load they bought, was also done away with, and a full complement of paid labourers was now kept at the mines who worked from sunrise to sunset. As a concession to the Raja's opposition to the measures, it was promised that if the measures led to any loss of revenue to Mandi they would be reviewed after five years, and that the Superintendent of Mandi Salt Mines would be answerable to the British Councillor in Mandi, Mr. Harrison.⁶⁹

These measures proved highly unpopular, both with the Raja and his administration and with the people. The Raja, immediately after he promulgated the new rules for the administration of salt mines on 1st February, 1871, dismissed the 'native' doctor, the school teacher, and some other officials, thereby ending those 'improvements' in the State, like the dispensary and school, which the British claimed credit for.⁷⁰ These were ostensibly done to effect economy that the State needed now, as its revenues were to be curtailed by the new salt rules imposed by the British. But the sulking of the Raja proved to be short-lived and some diplomatic efforts by the Councillor helped him to come to terms with the new measures within less than a month.

The unpopularity of the measures with the people proved more difficult to assuage. At the end of February falls *Shivratri*, the most important festival of the State, when all the local deities congregate at Mandi town, to pay homage to their ruler, Madho Rao and his vice-regent, the Raja. At this fair, which stretches into four days of festivities and revelry, a 'serious incident', representative of popular annoyance, took place.⁷¹ The British Councillor was sitting outside his house one evening watching the festivities, when a few hundred drunken men gathered and started abusing the '*Angrez lok*' and '*Angrez Raj*', and also personally insulting and abusing the Councillor.

69. *Ibid.* Letter No. 80–157, From T.H. Thorton, Secretary to Government, Punjab, to C.U. Aitchison, Secretary to Government of India, Foreign Department, dated Lahore, 25th February 1871.

70. *Foreign Department, Political Branch-A*, April, 1817, Nos. 199–202, *Report on Mandi Affairs*.

71. *Ibid.* Also *Foreign Department, Political Branch-A*, June 1871, Nos. 161–162 and Keepwiths, *Recent Disturbances in Mandi State*. The rest of the account is from this document.

When some servants of the British officer tried to disperse the crowd, they were beaten up and taken prisoner. Mr. Harrison, the Councillor, sent word to the Raja about the emergency and asked him to control the situation. But before the Raja could (or would) act, the crowd was dispersed by the efforts of Mr. Harrison and his servants. This was mainly possible since almost all the persons in this 'demonstration of discontent' were drunk and without any leader.

The British authorities at Jullundhar and Lahore were alarmed at this act of 'gross indiscipline' and 'insult to the representative of the Government'. The consequent enquiries concentrated on two issues, one the possible connection of this 'riot' with the new salt rules and any personal animosity that the new British Councillor may have generated among sections of the peasantry. From the sources – all official British records – it seems that these two issues were linked as far as the people of Mandi were concerned. They identified the new Councillor with the imposition of the new salt rules, which upset their economy and also was seen as an affront to the Raja's dignity. Mandi salt was a coarse form of rock salt and was used mainly for cattle, though it was also used for cooking in some areas. The most common complaint was that the cattle were suffering due to the inability of the villagers to buy salt at the new rates, specially when they had to make all their payments in cash, upfront, unlike earlier when they paid in kind and labour, over a longer period of time. The *Shivratri* festivals were the most important event in the religious and political life of Mandi. The local divinities journeyed to the seat of Madho Rao, the legal ruler of the State, accompanied by their main officials like the *Purohit*, the *Goor*, the *Kardar*, etcetera along with many of their lay followers.⁷² These officials of the deity were also the important political leaders of their areas and clans. The festival and its associated rituals were all directed towards reinforcing the supremacy of Madho Rao and his vice-regent, the *Raja*, over these lesser divinities and reiterating their allegiance and loyalty to them. At such a moment, the issue of the British affront to the prestige of their Raja and the intrusion into the working of their economy could prove to be a potent combination, as Mr. Harrison found out.

72. *Mandi*, 1920, pp. 61, 63.

A reading of these British sources shows one interesting aspect about the different pressures and interests that went into the making of official policy relating to the Hill States. After the initial panic, Mr. Harrison, it seems, felt that reports about the 'rebellion' were damaging his reputation as a political officer in a native State. Moreover, the Raja too, after his initial assertiveness, found that this issue was being taken with great seriousness in Lahore and Calcutta, leading him to fear the possibility of the British taking over management of the State. Thus one finds that in later correspondence from Mandi, the description of the event is regularly downgraded from 'rebellion' to 'riot' to 'drunken brawl' to 'some drunken malcontents, easily overpowered'!

The initial impression in Lahore was that these disturbances were encouraged by the *Raja* himself, since he had already shown his deep resentment at the intrusion of British administration into his territory and the curtailment of his revenue. The manner in which the Raja was made to agree to these new rules, that is, Mr. Harrison's 'diplomacy', too was questioned and some mention was made questioning the suitability of the officer for the sensitive post.⁷³ While neither the Councillor nor the Raja would have seen these remarks, it is possible that they got some indication of this official mood since there a very visible attempt after the initial reports to play down the gravity of the incident. What is of interest is that this was an indicator of very palpable discontent among the subjects of Mandi, and by 1874 the administration of the salt mines reverted to the Raja, but with most of the 'reforms' intact.⁷⁴ Thus, while the issue of the Raja's prestige and intrusion into his domain was settled in his favour, the issues concerning the peasants, like cash payment, etc. did not revert to the earlier system. The transformation of this non-monetary economic transaction into one based on cash was successfully completed.

73. *Foreign Department, Political Branch-A*, op.cit., *Keepwiths*, note signed M. (Viceroy) dated 13-5-1871, states '...a good deal of unnecessary annoyance has been given to the people of Mandi' mainly because 'a great want of tact and wisdom may be discovered in the proceedings of the officials'.

74. *Foreign Department, Political Branch-A*, November 1874, Nos. 215-217, *Mandi Salt Mines*.

Mr. Harrison departed from Mandi in 1872 on a promotion, having successfully staved off any spot on his reputation as a political officer.⁷⁵ From then till 1889, there was no British officer stationed in Mandi, when at the latter date Mr. H.J. Maynard was deputed to sort out the forest administration and other matters. He left after a year during which time he drew up instructions for the guidance of the Court, defined and classified civil and criminal suits, fixed a period of limitation for cases, and most importantly, framed rules regulating and defining the rights of agriculturists in the forests.⁷⁶ At his departure another British official, Mr. C.E. Fendall was appointed as Superintendent of Works, incharge of forests, roads, salt quarries, etc.

A result of these new exertions at 'improving' the administration was that there was a rebellion in the Saraj part of the State.⁷⁷ As has been noted at the beginning of this section, this part was mountainous and heavily forested. Agriculture did not produce that amount of surplus, that would have rendered the inhabitants free from their dependence on other productive activities, like pastoralism, hunting and gathering. Both these activities are based on the natural resources of the forests and this was now the target of the reforming British officials. While new restrictions were put on the entry of villagers into the forests, specially those of deodar and chil, the revenue and labour demand under Begar was kept the same. Each family in Saraj had to provide Begar labour thrice every year for a period of one month each time, even after the initial 'reforms' of Begar by the British. This extra Begar burden was traditionally imposed since the payment in kind and cash was much lesser than in the areas of the Beas valley, and like the contiguous areas of Suket, this area provided the manpower for the army. With the changes in the structure of State finances, forests became important revenue sources and the new rules found an enthusiastic supporter in the Raja, unlike his reaction during the issue of salt mines. With their access to forests curtailed and no reduction in the amount or nature of the State's demand, there was growing discontent among the peasantry. The changes were attributed to the intrusion of foreigners and interestingly, the outbreak of the 1893

75. Manmohan, op.cit., pg. 124.

76. *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

77. The account of this rebellion is taken from Manmohan, op.cit.

rebellion in Saraj was over the use of buffalo lymph in smallpox vaccines.

Smallpox in Mandi, like in many parts of South Asia, was identified with goddess Sitala. Medical and educational reforms, that is, the introduction of modern dispensaries and schools were much advanced in Mandi compared to other Hill States in the region. The vaccination against smallpox was a part of a series of measures that were being taken by the State on medical matters. This was also the time that the new forest rules were being implemented with vigour and the traditional demand for Begar thrice a year was increasingly becoming a burden difficult to carry for two reasons.

First, as has been noted earlier, much of the productive activities of the Saraj peasants were connected with the use of forest resources, and the new rules restricted precisely this. It, thus, cut into the total amount of production of the peasant family and the surplus they could part with. Second, with the growth of a cash economy in other parts of the State, and the extension of forest work in Saraj, paid labour was for the first time a possible addition to the family income. Begar imposed severe restrictions on the full utilisation of this new resource, and therefore became a much greater burden than earlier. These transformations, unprecedented in the memory of the Saraj peasant, were paralleled by the introduction of the smallpox vaccine. Its connection with religious beliefs and its identification as a purely foreign thing made it a target for attack. The disturbances covered the entire tract of Mandi, Saraj, and led to the disruption of government work in these parts for the greater part of the year. While the vaccination programme was immediately stopped, enquiries revealed that discontent was primarily due to the forest rules and the severity of Begar.

The *Dumh* of 1909 in Mandi was an uprising of the peasantry against the corruption and insensitivity of the State administration, and against the changes that were being effected in the forest management and in the Begar services.⁷⁸ More than 2,000 peasants

78. All the information of this event is taken from Manmohan, op.cit.; *Mandi, 1920*; and from *Foreign Department, Political Branch, August 1909, Internal, Nos. 15–24, Disturbances in Mandi State and Arrangements for Restoration of Order*.

gathered outside the town and demanded an audience with the king, which was repeatedly refused. Subsequently, they marched into the town and the 173 man Mandi army was not strong enough to resist them, neither did the officials have the confidence to challenge the rebels. Many officials, in fact, fled the State into the neighbouring territories and those who remained in the town were 'arrested' by the rebels and put in jail. British authorities were asked to help put down the uprising, but the rebels were in such a strong position that they were able to impose a change of the *Wazeer* even after the arrival of the first British officer. The whole event was marked by the almost total absence of any violence and the rebels insisted that like all earlier *Dumhs* this too was to help the *Raja* by exposing his corrupt officers, and thus 'reforming' the State. They repeatedly stressed that they were not against the *Raja* and that there was no need for the British to worry, since it was an internal matter between them and their king.

A look at the social composition of the rebels would show that they were all *Kanets* and it was the erosion of their traditional rights that caused their discontent.⁷⁹ The assessment and at times collection, of revenue in cash meant that there was no justification anymore for continuation of imposts like *Begar*, since these were originally a mechanism to overcome the paucity of material goods to collect. With the increase in the cultivation of crops that fetched a good price in the markets, *Begar* now implied a reduction in the time available for their cultivation. Moreover, under British calculations *Begar* became an impost in addition to land revenue, and thus was in actuality a category completely new. In the nineteenth century, revenue collection increased by about 250%, first under the Gurkhas and then the Sikhs, who in the 1840s were collecting over Rs 400,000 as revenue of the State.⁸⁰ Revenue collection reduced once the State became a suzerain of the British, but it does not seem to have gone down to the pre-Gurkha level. It would be worthwhile to find out the increase in real terms, since this was also the period when money was introduced for the first time in these hills, and this would evidently have led to some inflation. During the 'anarchy' of Gurkha and Sikh rule, when the regular mechanisms of revenue collection were disrupted and

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 2–4.

80. Manmohan, op.cit., pp. 109–110.

collections were only possible through 'raids', Begar demands might also have reduced since peasants would not like to leave their villages in times of turmoil. These Begar demands came back into revenue reckoning with the establishment of political stability.

The records from the beginning of the British times show a stubborn resistance to Begar. It seems that the character of Begar had changed in the nineteenth century from being a part of the land revenue to an impost added separately, which cut into the amount of time the peasant could spend on his land. Traditionally, Begar may have allowed a larger amount of flexibility in land use patterns, social relations and agricultural practices. What was demanded was the physical availability of one male per family at the service of the State or its officials. The process by which one male was rendered surplus to the household was not the State's concern but was a function of the polyandrous family. This flexibility was lost in the British period with the trend of partition of land between brothers and the revenue assessment based on land and not on family. It is in these terms that a possible understanding of the reasons for Begar, becoming the central issue in all peasant agitation in the Himalayas, during the colonial period, may be found.

Forests, which came under the increasing attention of the British and the local States, had provided a whole range of resources for the villagers. Large forest areas had been denuded by the beginning of the 20th century and those remaining were being reserved and/or marked out for future felling.⁸¹ This was considered as a liquidation of the king's wealth by his corrupt officials, and was also opposed for the limitations it placed on the peasants' rights to the forests. It is necessary to be careful in jumping to conclusions about the anti-peasant thrust of forest management, since the requirements of the British and of the peasants diverged to a large extent, so that they may not have come into conflict till much later.

The character of agricultural production also changed in the British period. Land was the source of wealth in pre-British times and it remained so in the period under study, but the nature of the wealth it produced had changed in the meantime. Land now produced

81. *Disturbances in Mandi State and Arrangements for Restoration of Order*, pp. 2–4.

money, and thus the wealth that it produced could be saved and accumulated in a much easier manner. The possibilities that this new form of wealth opened up were unprecedented – the possibility of turning land and the cash it generated into capital. Land developed some features of a commodity, among traditional proprietary peasants – the *Khash-Kanet*.⁸²

The development of classes within the boundaries of clans was also a new feature. While there often were large differences in the amount of land cultivated by different members of the same *Khash-Kanet* community, this stratification did not transform into class differentiation, till the influence of markets. The non-cultivating land owners like the Brahmins and the Rajputs, and the Khatris in Mandi, were dependent on the labour of the Bethus and Kolis to cultivate that land which they had not rented to the *Kanets*. It may have seemed natural for the class boundaries to emerge on these existent historical fault-lines. But it seems from the available sources that some *Khash-Kanet* families were descending into the category of agricultural labourers, sometimes landless but most often with reduced amounts of land possession, which was insufficient for their survival.

Parallel to this, was the emergence of some Kolis into the market, to sell agricultural produce from the land given to them under *Beth* tenure for their subsistence, but which was now producing some cash crops. Without control of land, this small but significant section within the Kolis were developing political ambitions of an upwardly mobile peasantry; a trend which discussed further in the last section of this chapter and in the sixth chapter.

It seems that methods of ‘primitive accumulation’ were as important as the working of the neutral market in the transformation of stratification to class, and the loss of land by *Khash-Kanets*.

It might be worthwhile quoting from the complaints, that were recorded with the British during the Mandi *Dumh*

The method [of seizure of zamindars’ land] is to demand from the zamindar to see his title deed (*Patta*) on the pretext that the zamindar is in possession of more land than is warranted by the deed. They [the State

82. *Mandi*, 1920, pp. 184–186, also *Disturbances in Mandi State and Arrangements for Restoration of Order*, pp.2–4, 8–15.

officials] then retain the deed, take possession of the land and enjoy its produce.⁸³

And also

Misrepresentation of facts [by revenue officials] for collection of State dues [who]... on the false plea of non recovery of dues from lessees and in collusion with the Wazeer get instalment fixed of so much per annum, whereas the full amount has been recovered.⁸⁴

The State officials against whom the complaint was being made were overwhelmingly Khatri.⁸⁵ This group – an off-shoot of the Punjabi Khatri caste – dominated the State administration and owned large tracts of land as absentee landlords and moneylenders. They were deeply disliked by the peasants since they were considered outsiders, and the cause for almost all the oppression and corruption in the State.⁸⁶ The disruption in the traditional order was related to the perceived increase rapaciousness of the State officials, who now had, in their greed, overstepped historically accepted bounds of legitimate State action. This disregard of given limits was against the moral order and would adversely affect the king who presided over it. It was therefore necessary for his subjects to come out in the open and help him overcome these bad influences.⁸⁷ Thus argued the rebel peasants in Mandi, 1909.

In that rebellion one finds that within ten days of the peasants congregating on the outskirts of Mandi town, the whole administration of the *Raja* had collapsed and the rebel leaders were in a position to dictate to the king their various demands, in spite of the presence of British officers and a few dozen of their policemen. They did not force the king on any issue except to get him to change the *Wazeer*. When this did not lead to any further action on their other demands, they were in a dilemma about what to do further.⁸⁸ It was understood by all that they had come to rid the king of his corrupt

83. *Disturbances in Mandi State and Arrangements for Restoration of Order*, Pg.3.

84. *Ibid.*

85. *Ibid.*

86. *Mandi, 1920*, pp.82–83.

87. Manmohan, op. cit., pp.127, 135–136.

88. *Disturbances in Mandi State and Arrangements for Restoration of Order*, pp. 7, 8.

ministers, and it was an assumption that this would lead to things coming back to what they 'ought' to be. Therefore, when *Raja* Bhawani Sen appointed a new *Wazeer* in an open Durbar, most peasants began to go home, as they felt that their job was well done.

But what is noteworthy is that many stayed back as they were not satisfied. Even though they controlled the town for another two weeks until the eventual arrival of the British troops, they did nothing but strut about town boasting of their power. They could not comprehend why their other demands relating to Begar, forest rights, depredations of the Khatri officials, etc. were not being addressed even after the change in the *Wazeer* and what they could do to force the situation. The peasants did not consider these *Dumhs* as rebellions but rather as reforming movements, whereby the subjects actively come out to help the king in restoring social harmony.⁸⁹

The protection of British arms for the *Raja* also carried its price as has been discussed in ch. 3. He now had to obey the directives of the British even against the established custom and the wishes of the people. The king, who now presided over the inauguration of the new dispensation, could not maintain himself as the guardian of the universally accepted social order. This weakened his ideological hold over the people, and it weakened the ideological hold of the whole system. This restructuring of political power and the concomitant social relations rise, opened up space for the growth and nurturing of new ideas of political community and social relations.⁹⁰

There seems to have been a non-deliberative redefining of the moral goods in society, which were now influenced by new ideas that came along with the opening of the roads and other communication channels. The political economy of the State changed too. There was obsolescence of certain 'economies' which were earlier of considerable importance, and a concomitant development of new and/or previously insignificant economic resources.

Natural resources, which were available 'free' to the villagers, now became 'precious' to the State and were jealously guarded. A good example of this would be forests.⁹¹ The incidence of cash collection of

89. *Mandi*, 1920, op. cit., pp. 68–69, 86.

90. *Mandi Gazetteer*, 1904, Lahore, 1905, pp. 62–64.

91. *Mandi Gazetteer*, 1904, op. cit., pp. 49, 54. *Mandi*, 1920, pp. 151–155, 158–162.

revenue or rent led to a decrease in the production of millets and pulses and other local food crops, and an increase in the production of wheat, rice and cash crops that fetched higher prices.⁹² Not that all these changes were necessarily negative in their result. The substitution of wheat for millets and the relatively more money that this implied, meant a definite improvement in the nutritional value of the food intake of the people. The availability of cash also meant greater economic opportunities, at least for some people. But since all these profoundly changed the existing pattern of life, they were initially unwelcome to most people.

This inability to comprehend processes beyond individuals, like the cunning *Wazeers*, incompetent *Rajas* or rapacious outsiders, can be perhaps understood as the inability of the peasants to come out of the ideological hold of the institution of kingship and the related understanding of politics.

The king was the centre of the world and all power flowed from and to him. He maintained the cosmic balance, and thus ensured the well being of his subjects. It was conceptually impossible for the king to be at fault and all causes for evil had to be found somewhere else, e.g., the courtiers.⁹³ Traditionally all *Dumhs* had ended with the fall of the 'evil minister' and/or the reform of the malignant spirit, etc.⁹⁴ When the new *Wazeer* was appointed in 1909, the agenda of the *Dumh* had been fulfilled and things should have come back to normal. The peasants were at a loss when they found that this did not anymore suffice. It was not just the rebels who reached a dead end, since not even the State administration knew what to do. The impasse was resolved only by the intervention of the two companies of the 32nd Pioneers of the British Indian Army thus, proving for all concerned that there was little scope for social tensions to be resolved within the traditional political and ideological frameworks.

But for the moment there was this dead end. The rebellion of 1909 was the culmination of the tensions that were building up in the local

92. I am grateful to Chandramani Kashyap of Bhagwan Mohalla, Mandi for bringing my notice to this process, April 1995. He recounted innumerable anecdotes and examples of the changing nature of agricultural practices and village politics.

93. *Mandi, 1920*, pp. 61– 63.

94. *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 69.

society with the advent of British rule, and the rebellion became the moment when local power relations were redefined. The massive show of Kanet strength mobilised large numbers of the peasants into political action and it also showed that the king's power to intervene had been taken away. This breakdown in the traditional ideological framework opened up the people to new ideas. While some of the leaders of the 1909 agitation were caught and jailed, one Sidhu Ram escaped and was involved in many small local agrarian disturbances till he was caught and convicted in the 1915 Mandi Conspiracy Case, which was perhaps linked to the Ghaddar revolutionaries of Punjab.⁹⁵ Many other rebels got involved in the Praja Mandal agitation later. This rebellion was at one level an expression of anger against the Khatri landlords by the proprietary peasant Kanet. In other parts of the region, where there were no Khatris this anger was directed against whichever group was perceived as the local oppressor the major landlord. It had the effect of asserting the rights of the peasant proprietor and led to a withdrawal of the large landed elements from agriculture into other professions and in business.

The Dhami Rebellion of 1939–40

Dhami was among the original *Bara Thakurai* or twelve principalities, which were confirmed under British paramountcy at the conclusion of the Anglo-Gurkha war of 1815–1816.⁹⁶ It was about 25 square miles in area, 5 miles in length and an equal amount in width. Its primary drainage was into the Sutlej river but some minor streams drained into the Gumbher river, which was part of the Yamuna drainage system. It was composed of high peaks with intervening valleys, its capital being in a large village by the name of Halog. It was close to the British summer capital of Simla where many of this Hill State's subjects were employed. Its population was estimated at around 5000 at the time of the incidents which became famous as the Dhami incident, and were noticed even by the Congress leadership, including Gandhi and Nehru. Administratively it was divided into seven Parganas, by name *Dhamar, Nabswar, Bari, Kamrehrh, Seon, Neol* and *Parech*. One *Mahta* who

95. This information was provided by Chaman Lal Malhotra, Mandi, though he could not give any sources for it.

96. Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States, 1910, *Dhami*, reprinted 1995, Delhi.

was assisted in the conduct of official business by one *Mahr* and one peon administered each Pargana. Apart from that one *Negi* assisted by three constables were in charge of maintaining law and order within the *Pargana* along with 25 *Koli* families who held revenue free land for working as policemen and *shikar* helpers.

The first land revenue settlement was completed in 1916.⁹⁷ It recorded a total *Muafi*, or revenue free land, of the value of Rs 660, which included the 25 Kolis mentioned above. This would indicate that there were few institutions in the State, which controlled land of any significance, and therefore there was also no major political institution between the Raja and his subjects. In 1920, the total collection of land revenue was Rs 17,500 paid bi-annually in cash after the two harvests. Income from the forests amounted to Rs 13,000. The total income of Dhami for that year was Rs 40,800 out of which the expenditure was budgeted at Rs 37,000.

On the 13th of July, 1939 the Dhami State Praja Mandal was formed at a meeting in Simla attended by about 600 peasants from the State and its neighbouring areas, who gathered there inspite of a heavy shower.⁹⁸ This meeting adopted a charter of demands, which became basic to all the Praja Mandals that were formed in the different Hill States after this. This charter of demands listed the installation of an elected government of peoples' representatives as its first program. A 50% remission of land revenue, abolition of Begar, civil liberties and free speech were other prominent demands of this charter.⁹⁹ It also called on the Raja to recognise the Dhami State Praja Mandal as the true representative of the people and call its leaders for talks on the charter of demands that it had adopted. This resolution was forwarded to the Dhami Rana who was given time till 16th of July to reply to

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97. The 1916 land settlement was still in force at the time of this rebellion. The main parts of this settlement, the revenues it generated and the objections of the peasants are contained in letter from A.C. Elliot, Superintendent Hill States to Chief Secretary, Punjab Government dated 03.03.1920; Foreign Department Political (Native States) Proceedings, April 1920, No. 3.
 98. The Tribune dated Lahore, 17.07.1939.
 99. *Ibid.* Also see Letter from Resident, Punjab States to Secretary, Foreign Department, Government of India dated 20.07.1939, India Office Records: R/1/29/1950.

the demands, failing which a mass delegation of the Praja Mandal would go to the Dhami Durbar led by Bhag Mal Sautha, a prominent Praja Mandal activist. A copy of this resolution was sent to the Political Agent of the Governor General to the Punjab Hill States and to the Resident of the Punjab Hill States.

This planned action was preceded by the relative success of a similar Praja Mandal agitation in the tiny Hill State of Kunihar, where a similar mass delegation led by Bhag Mal Sautha led to the promise of popularly elected reform committee by the Thakur of the State.¹⁰⁰

Inspite of the success at Kunihar, the Praja Mandal's threat of mass mobilisation of peasants for clearly political demands was unprecedented in the history of British rule in the region. Kunihar was not only a tiny principality composed of three villages, it was not politically important in the affairs of the region. Dhami on the other hand was relatively larger and its forests were the main centre for *shikar* tours of the Governor General. Many Dhami subjects also worked in government offices of Simla, and thus it could not be ignored like Kunihar. In any case the events at Kunihar had alerted the British officials posted at Simla about the consequences of unchecked Praja Mandal activities in the Hill States under their protection.

The Rana of Dhami panicked and rushed to meet Burnett, the Political Agent, in Simla.¹⁰¹ The official British advice to the Rana was to keep his calm and meet the delegation with its demands. But they also advised him to insist that the delegation should be composed only of Dhami subjects and outsiders like Bhag Mal Sautha, should not be allowed.¹⁰² Burnett also promised to try and restrain the main Praja Mandal leaders in Simla on Magisterial orders. This could not be done since the concerned officials were not in town and there was a paucity of time.

100. This is discussed in C.L. Dutta, *The Raj and the Simla Hill States: Socio-Economic Problems, Agrarian Disturbances and Paramountcy*, Jalandhar, 1997, pp. 248–54.

101. Detailed *Report on Dhami Firing* dated 27.07.1939, No. F.D. 2/39, India Office Records R/1/29/1950. Also Letter from Resident dated 20.07.1939, op.cit.

102. *Ibid.*

The official account of the events of 16th July claims that a crowd of over 2,000 men marched to Dhami from Simla, led by Bhag Mal Sautha.¹⁰³ At the border of the Hill State Sautha was informed that he was not allowed to enter Dhami, an order he disobeyed. He was then arrested by the State police and was being taken to the prison in Halog. The crowd, which had come from Simla, followed him and got agitated when they saw that he was being taken towards the prison. They attempted to stop the police and raised slogans and threw sticks and stones at the police. At the approach of the mob, the police fired at them. There was also an assemblage of State subjects who were the Rana's supporters. They too joined in with the police in dispersing the Praja Mandalists who were trying to free Bhag Mal Sautha from the police.¹⁰⁴ In the firing two persons, Durga and Rup Ram, who were part of the Praja Mandal's mass delegation died of gunshot wounds. At least 30 others received gunshot wounds, which were not fatal. Along with Sautha, Mansha Ram and Dharam Dass were also arrested.¹⁰⁵

News of this incident reached Burnett in Simla at around 7:30 p.m. on the same day and he rushed to Dhami with a doctor and a posse of policemen.¹⁰⁶ On way they found 15 persons with serious bullet injuries at Jutogh Cantonment, who were on their way to Simla for medical treatment. One of those injured had bullet injuries in his groin and claimed that the Rana had shot him.¹⁰⁷

Sautha and the other arrested Praja Mandal leaders began a hunger strike in jail.¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, the Rana ordered the stoppage of *hukka-pani* for all those who were part of the Praja Mandal leadership, and those who came to meet or legally defend the arrested leaders.¹⁰⁹ This implied that it was not possible for any Praja Mandal sympathiser to get any food, water or accommodation in Dhami. The trial of the arrested persons was completed quickly. They were tried under

103. *Ibid.*

104. *Ibid.*

105. *Ibid.*

106. *Ibid.*

107. *Ibid.*

108. The Tribune dated Lahore, 18.07.1939 and 31.07.1939.

109. *Ibid.* 31.07.1939.

sections 188 and 200 of the IPC and sentenced to 3 months rigorous imprisonment and fined Rs 400.¹¹⁰

On 17th of July, the Simla City Congress Committee organised a large public meeting to condemn the firing and demand justice for the subjects of Dhami from the British authorities.¹¹¹ This meeting also decided to call a *hartal* in the town the next day, which seems to have been almost complete. It came to notice at this meeting that more than 250 Dhami residents had fled their homes in the villages and were staying in *dharamsalas* or with relatives in Simla. It was also decided to take up the matter of the tyranny and misrule of the Hill States in a more organised manner and mobilise public opinion against it.

On 27th of July, a delegation comprising Sham Lal of the Simla District Congress Committee, Sita Ram Sharma of the Dhami State Praja Mandal, Kahn Singh Sautha who was a lawyer and brother of Bhag Mal Sautha and Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur met Mahatma Gandhi in Delhi, who expressed sympathy with the demands of the Praja Mandal. Gandhi heard them out and directed them to meet Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the President of the All India States' Peoples' Conference.¹¹² A result of this meeting was that Gandhi wrote on the Dhami firings and related issues in the *Harjan* of 5th August, 1939, thus bringing the incident into the notice of the widest possible section of nationalist thought. Gandhi also wrote to the Rana of Dhami and demanded a judicial enquiry into all the events that went to make the 'Dhami tragedy'.¹¹³ The delegation from the hills met Nehru in Allahabad on 31st July and was promised unstinted support of the All India States' Peoples' Conference to the struggles of the Simla peasantry.¹¹⁴ Questions about the firing and the resultant deaths were also raised in the British Parliament.¹¹⁵

110. *Ibid.*

111. *Ibid.* 19.07.1939 and 20.07.1939.

112. *Ibid.* 28.07.1939.

113. *Ibid.* 03.08.1939.

114. *Ibid.*

115. Telegram No. 1207 from Secretary of State to Crown Representative dated 19.07.1939, India Office Records R/1/29/1950. Dhami being a favourite 'hunting ground' of the highest British officials in India, many in the British parliament had personal contact with the Hill State and its ruler.

Under all this pressure and after the prompting of the British officials, the *Rana* finally appointed an enquiry committee composed of eight ‘respectable’ subjects of the State. This committee came out with findings, which absolved the *Rana* of all blame, and was almost completely a re-statement of the ‘official’ position.¹¹⁶ The report stated that many Dhami subjects worked in Simla and some of them lived there. These people came under the influence of ‘so-called political leaders and agitators’, who only wanted to spread terror and anarchy in the Simla Hill States. These leaders formed the Dhami State Praja Mandal along with the participation of some State subjects and talked of ‘establish[ing] the government of zamindars’. For the furtherance of their agenda they appointed the following as *Lambardars* parallel to the State officers. These were Bhagat Ram Brahman (peon at Simla Army HQ), Tulsi Ram Brahman, Narain Kanet, Bhagat Ram Kanet, Parma Brahman, Parma Nand Brahman, Jiwanu and Das Kanets (both gardeners at the Vice-Regal lodge at Simla, the former was a head *mali*, since dismissed and the latter continued working as a *mali*). This report claimed that many Dhami subjects were still under the influence of these outsiders who were the real cause of trouble. These non-State subjects who styled themselves as leaders brought a mob of mischief mongers with them on the 16th of July, and these people caused the stone pelting and rioting which led to the firing by the police. The report, nonetheless, recommended a relief of Rs 100 to the next of kin of those two who were killed and the remission of their land revenue till their eldest son attained majority.¹¹⁷ The *Rana* accepted the findings of this report and also asked the British to dismiss those named in the report who were government employees.

Parallel to this official enquiry committee there was an enquiry committee formed by the Himalaya Riyasati Praja Mandal with Lala Duni Chand Ambalvi, advocate, MLA Punjab, and member, AICC, as president.¹¹⁸ The secretary was Sridev Suman, chairman of Parvatia Praja Parishad, Delhi and Hill States’ Peoples’ representative on All India States’ Peoples’ Congress Standing Committee. The two other

116. *Report of the Enquiry Committee Appointed by Rana Dalip Singh of Dhami*, 13.10.1939, F15-SM/39, India Office Records R/1/29/1950.

117. *Ibid.*

118. *Report of Non-Official Enquiry Committee*, sent to Political Secretary, Government of India, 02.08.1939, India Office Records R/1/29/1950.

members were Lala Kishori Lal of the Simla Arya Samaj and Lala Sham Lal of the Simla City Congress Committee. This committee recorded the statements of 30 witnesses separately and a joint statement of more than 200 subjects of Dhami who were present at the firing.¹¹⁹ Of the 30 whose individual statements were recorded, 21 had been wounded in the firing and subsequent commotion and of these 9 were admitted to the Ripon hospital at Simla. This non-official enquiry committee divided the grievances of the people into two sets, the ordinary and the extra-ordinary.

The ordinary grievances related to the excessive land revenue that was demanded of the State subjects, the heavy Begar requisitions, conversion of uncultivated peasant lands into demarcated and reserved forests, denial of civil liberties, ban on killing wild beasts which threatened their lives and crops, and finally the absence of any judicial or administrative institution independent of the Rana.

The issue relating to the demarcation of forests and the ban on killing animals was most pressing in Dhami. This hill state was the favourite hunting ground (literally) of the Viceroy and other high British officials like the Commander in Chief. Every summer there were quite a few hunting expeditions organised in this hill state which earned the Rana some money and a lot many petty personal favours from the Viceroy.¹²⁰

The Rana seems to have cherished these *shikar* trips of the Viceroy since it allowed him to interact closely with the most powerful man in India and thus buffeted his self-esteem. For this reason there was a constant pressure on the peasants from the Dhami State to increase the size of the forest area and also preserve as much of the game as possible.¹²¹ Every hunting trip had to satisfy the Viceroy's demands of large quantities of game and, therefore, special care was taken to stop the killing of wild animals by peasants. This seems to have been an important grievance with the peasants since the protection afforded to these animals in Dhami, except during a few days of wanton killing, meant that many animals would come into the forests of Dhami from neighbouring areas, where similar strictness was not observed in

119. *Ibid.*

120. *Ibid.*

121. *Ibid.*

protecting wild animals. Dhami was composed of relatively high peaks and steep gradients, which meant that a larger proportion of cultivated land would be located outside the limits of human settlements, and therefore more liable to spoliation by animals.

The extra-ordinary grievances that were listed by the non-official enquiry committee concerned those acts of the Dhami State and its officials, which were not even legitimised by the rules and laws of the State. These included forcible exactions of many kinds, indiscriminate fines, forcible levies for labour without proper notice, confiscation of peasants' property and instances of cruelty by the Rana, his relatives and other high officials of the State.¹²² The peasants also stated that earlier property was inherited upto the fifth degree of relation in case there were no direct inheritors, but the Rana changed this to three degrees and if no suitable heir was found within this range the land escheated to the State. Death in the Rana's family led to a ban on women subjects wearing ornaments for one year, apart from the general ban on eating meats, marriage and other festivities. Non-compliance of these demands led to heavy fines ranging from Rs 50 to 100. Any agent of the State or policeman could enter any peasant's house to collect fines and take anything they thought of value. Apart from that, the Rs 800 given by the Viceroy to the State subjects for Begar during *shikar* in 1938 was not distributed among those whose Begar was forcefully requisitioned, and the Rana pocketed the money. Many other instances of forcible requisition of unpaid labour were highlighted.¹²³

This committee highlighted these grievances of the Dhami subjects and agreed that their demand for elected responsible government was natural. But it still felt that the demand for establishing such a government at such short notice was impractical and incorrect, since this was unprecedented in the history of the region. Their report heavily criticised the conduct of the Dhami authorities and the Rana in particular for unnecessary use of force, for callousness in caring for the wounded and insensitivity to his subjects. It also found fault with the British administration for its partisan behaviour, which initially gave wrong advice to the Rana and later tried to cover up his crime,

122. *Ibid.*

123. *Ibid.*

by not ordering a post-mortem of the two dead State subjects. It finally recommended that the Rana should be deprived of executive and juridical powers, which should be handed over to a provisional administration, until it was finally given to a popular government. This report was submitted to the All India States' Peoples' Congress Standing Committee at its meeting at Wardha in October 1939.¹²⁴ As a consequence of the issues raised in it, the All India States' Peoples' Congress appointed Shanti Dhawan for conducting a general enquiry into the administration and political conditions in all the Simla hill states.¹²⁵

The support given by the All India States' Peoples' Congress and the Simla based Congress committees bolstered the agitation of the Dhami State Praja Mandal. It was now taken over by the Himalayan Riyasati Praja Mandal, which was the parent body of all the local Praja Mandals. The Himalayan Riyasati Praja Mandal printed handbills and other propaganda material and distributed it in the different villages of the State.¹²⁶ Meetings were organised in Simla too where a large number of Dhami residents and recent 'political exiles' lived.

Organised attempts were made to get the support of peasants in all the seven parganas of the State, especially where the people were on the Rana's side. The main method adopted for this was to get the entire village or clan to take an oath on the local deity, that all members would not co-operate with the State or its agents.¹²⁸ Whoever broke this oath after taking part in it would have his *hukka pani* stopped by the entire village or whichever community he was part of. This was similar to the tactics adopted by the *Rana* initially to combat the mobilisations of the Dhami State Praja Mandal. This taking of the oath by all the villagers in a group made it close to impossible for individual members to break away even under repression and intense pressure from the Rana, since breaking the oath taken in the

124. The Hindustan Times dated New Delhi, 18.10.1939.

125. *Ibid.*

126. Letter No. F.D. 3/39 from Political Agent, Punjab hill states to Resident, Punjab hill states dated 01.12.1939, India Office Records: L/P&S/13/1372.

127. Letter No. F.Misc. 18/36 from Political Agent, Punjab Hill States to Resident, Punjab Hill States dated 16.10.1939, India Office Records: L/P&S/13/1372.

presence of the deity would entail expulsion from the community.¹²⁸ After expulsion from the community the individual was prohibited from eating, drinking, smoking, marriage, commercial transactions, community assistance and even walking over the fields of other members of his community. This mass taking of the oath for non-cooperation was successful in all but *Neol* pargana, and more than 115 erstwhile supporters of the *Rana* joined the rebels by 15th September 1939.¹²⁹

This tactic of putting the oath on entire villages and communities was primarily successful since most of the *pujaris* and *purohits* were part of the Dhami State Praja Mandal. So much so that the family priest of *Rana* Dalip Singh, Sita Ram Sharma, refused to perform any religious ceremonies for him between August to December 1939.¹³⁰ Other prominent religious leaders who were prominent rebels were Bhadraya from the *pujari* family of the palace temple and Parma Nand of pargana *Kamrerh* who held revenue free temple lands.¹³¹ The predominance of the Khash-Kanets in the movement is evident in the list of main activists in all the parganas.¹³² What is of special interest to the understanding of the social composition of the rebels and the support base of the emergent Praja Mandals, was the active participation of the landless agricultural labourers, the Bethus, who belonged to the Dagi-Koli castes.¹³³

The Bethus who were very active in the agitations, which followed the firing, were all attached to the *Rana*'s personal lands, the *Basa*.¹³⁴ They refused to supply grass and fuel wood to the *Rana*'s household

128. *Ibid.* During my field trip in 1995 I still found people taking oaths on their village and clan deity regarding diverse affairs like marriage, commercial transactions including loans and sale on credit, property disputes and many other similar things. Rarely, if ever, these oaths were reported broken and such action was always followed, I was assured, by divine retribution.

129. *Ibid.*

130. Note by Political Agent, Punjab Hill States, D.O. No. F. Misc. 16-SM/39, India Office Records: R/1/29/1950.

131. *Ibid.*

132. Letter No. F.Misc. 18/36 from Political Agent, Punjab Hill States, op.cit.

133. *Ibid.*

134. *Ibid.*

and also defaulted on payments of other cesses.¹³⁵ 21 Bethus were part of the 250 and more State subjects who fled after the firing. They returned later and worked on the *Basa* lands but still refused to make any payments that were due. Apart from these agricultural labourers the grass sellers of pargana Bari which was close to Simla carried messages between the residents of Dhami and those activists of the Praja Mandal who lived in Simla.¹³⁶

There was a live contact between the activists who were resident in Dhami and those who lived in Simla.¹³⁷ Daily news and messages were conveyed from one place to the other. Handbills were circulated and propaganda carried out by word of mouth and village level meetings. At such gatherings the invincibility of Gandhi and the possibility of Germany winning the war were stressed.¹³⁸ Women were encouraged to come out openly into Praja Mandal activities. They were encouraged to break small laws in the presence of State officials and then refuse court summons.¹³⁹ In this sense this was the most well organised peasant movement witnessed till that time in the Western Himalayas. The refusal to pay land revenue was a universal feature, and even those who were not active participants of the movement took part in this protest.

In the last week of September, the Rana sent a police inspector with five policemen to *Seon* pargana to help those who were outcast by their community for breaking the oath of non-cooperation and not for any religious defilement.¹⁴⁰ Narainu, the leader of the agitators in the pargana threatened to use his gun in case the policemen tried to force their way or if any arrests were made. The police party was surrounded by a large mass of peasants including many women armed with sickles and men with lathis.¹⁴¹ The policemen did not take any action but managed to send information about their precarious position to the Rana who sent reinforcements. Finally, the crowd of peasants was forced to disperse when it became obvious that any

135. *Ibid.*

136. *Ibid.*

137. *Ibid.*

138. *Ibid.*

139. *Ibid.*

140. *Ibid.*

141. *Ibid.*

further confrontation would lead to violence. Shiv Ram and Badlu, two prominent activists of the Dhami State Praja Mandal, were arrested and taken to Halog. Narainu managed to escape and was not caught by the State authorities till the very end. Badlu apologised to the Rana and was left off, Shiv Ram, who was an Arya Samajist, refused to apologise and was imprisoned.¹⁴²

By October 1939 the Dhami State Praja Mandal was willing to call off its agitation if the Rana of Dhami met and discussed their demands with a delegation. The main demand remained the establishment of representative government in the form of a popularly elected council, which would be responsible for the conduct of administration and also act as a court.¹⁴³ The Rana refused to meet any delegation and also refused to give any recognition to the Dhami State Praja Mandal.¹⁴⁴ This was on the basis of the advice given by the Assistant Political Agent, N. Ramsay. He thought that any recognition to the Dhami State Praja Mandal or agreement to talk to them would be “the thin edge of the wedge for interference by some Congress leaders or agitators or any of the two Praja Mandals”.

In correspondences with the Political Agent's office the Rana claimed that popular support for the Dhami State Praja Mandal was waning, but that the people were afraid of breaking the divine oath.¹⁴⁵ He wanted the ringleaders of the agitation arrested so that the peasants get over their awe of these people and accept orders from the Rana. Once the leadership of the Praja Mandal was behind bars, the Rana claimed that he would be able to wean his subjects away from the non-cooperation that they had launched. The Political Agent enquired whether the Rana was not competent to release the people from the divine oath they had taken, since he too was vested with theocratic powers. To this the Rana replied that while this was technically possible in olden times, these days his subjects only

142. *Ibid.*

143. *Ibid.*

144. *Ibid.* The Political Agent was dead set against bestowing any respectability or legitimacy on the Praja Mandal. In this policy he got complete support from his superior the Resident of the Punjab hill states.

145. Letter No. F.Misc. 22/36 from Political Agent, Punjab Hill States to Resident, Punjab hill states dated 16.11.1939, India Office Records: L/P&S/13/1372.

accepted the authority of the pujaris and purohits in religious matters¹⁴⁷. Therefore, if these religious leaders were removed from among the people it would be possible to make them break their oath.

In association with these points, the Rana also announced some concessions relating to the demands of the people regarding their rights to the forests¹⁴⁸. First, each peasant was allowed to kill two *ghorls* and *kakkars* each without the use of firearms and landowners could collect grass, leaves and dead wood from the State forests without the use of any tools. Second, some concessions regarding Begar during the funeral and birthday celebrations of the Rana were reduced and payment of 4 annas per day was promised for the supply of grass and wood to the Durbar.

The Dhami State Praja Mandal rejected these concessions outright.¹⁴⁹ They claimed that these were meagre and impractical. It was not possible to kill wild animals without arms and difficult to collect enough grass without sickles. They reiterated the earlier demands and exhorted the peasants to continue with the non-cooperation of State officials, specially the refusal of revenue and Begar. They also decided to celebrate 29 January, 1940 as Independence Day.

The concessions of the Rana were obviously not enough. Perhaps, his explanation that the peasants were afraid of the divine oath was true, but there was no let up in the resolve of the State subjects in refusing revenue payments.¹⁵⁰ Till 31st January, 1940 only Rs 600 out of a total demand of Rs 8000 had been collected as land revenue.¹⁵¹

146. *Ibid.* This seems to substantiate the point made in the previous chapter in the section titled 'Clan and Deity under Paramountcy'. The rulers were being reduced to mere 'secular' administrators while the control of the clan institutions over the 'moral economy' of the peasant increased.

147. Letter No. F-15-SM/39 from Resident, Punjab States to Political Advisor, Crown Representative dated 06.02.1940, India Office Records: R/1/29/2140.

148. Handbill issued by Padamdev Gautam, President, Himalaya Riyasati Praja Mandal, Simla enclosed in Letter No. F-15-SM/39, op.cit.

149. Letter No. F-15-SM/39, op.cit.

150. *Ibid.*

151. Letter No. F.Misc. 18/36 from Political Agent, Punjab Hill States to Resident, Punjab States dated 21.03.1940, India Office Records: R/1/29/2140.

He repeatedly expressed his helplessness at the inadequacy of the Dhami police force in enforcing his orders, and continuously requested the British authorities to intervene or provide him police reinforcements. Finally on 22nd February, 1940 the British authorities acted.

Burnett, the Political Agent of the Governor, General for the Punjab Hill States sent his assistant Ramsay to Dhami with a contingent of 25 policemen from the Punjab Reserve Force.¹⁵² They, accompanied with the Rana's own men, occupied the two main rebel villages of *Seon* pargana. This force met no resistance. Most men, who included the main activists of the Dhami State Praja Mandal, absconded from their homes. The property, both domestic and land, of the absconders was attached and many 'sympathisers' were arrested with arms. The women were not allowed to leave the village boundaries. Orders were given that in the event of any active defiance to these measures by the villagers, firearms were to be used to establish the authority of the Rana and the British. In the meanwhile, all those Praja Mandal activists who worked in government offices in Simla, including those mentioned in the Dhami State's official report on the July firing, were dismissed from their jobs.¹⁵³

Notwithstanding the condemnation that this action received from the nationalist opinion in other parts of the country, this police action seems to have been effective from the point of view of the Rana and the British. By 20th March, 1940 all the revenue of *Seon* pargana had been paid in full, including from the houses of the absconders.¹⁵³ Earlier Sita Ram had been arrested in Simla on 30th December, 1939 under section 38, Ordinance V of the Defence of India Rules, 1939 and was released only after he gave an undertaking that he would refrain from all further activity in political matters.¹⁵⁴ In August of 1940, the last four absconders of *Seon* pargana surrendered to the State authorities and the agitation and its remnants formally ended.¹⁵⁵

152. *Ibid.*

153. *Ibid.*

154. Political Agent, Punjab Hill States, Fortnightly Report end 31.05.1940, India Office Records: L/P&S/13/1372.

155. Letter No. F.Misc. 18/36 from Political Agent, Punjab Hill States to Resident, Punjab States dated 15.08.1940, India Office Records: L/P&S/13/1372.

Jawarharlal Nehru's was a lonely voice which protested the repression of the Dhami peasantry as the mainstream of the National Movement forgot about this 'incident' in the Simla hills.¹⁵⁶ The official estimates were that this unrest had caused the State Rs 27000 in payment defaults and costs of pacification. Of this amount Rs 7000 were to be recovered from the peasants of *Seon* pargana as costs for the maintenance of law and order.¹⁵⁷

Bethu Agitation in Koti, 1939

Koti was a Hill State bigger than Dhami in size but a feudatory of the *Raja* of Keonthal.¹⁵⁸ It bounded the northern and north-eastern boundaries of Simla town, and thus was of greater importance to Hill State politics than its political status and protocol hierarchy would imply. It was 35 square miles in area and composed of five parganas. Till 1916 the revenue collections remained organised around the traditional imposts and methods of calculation and collection. This implied calculations of cultivated area according to seed weight, a method that was given to abuse specially in times of cash crops and cash assessments. The imposition of new taxes and the unclear status of Begar commutation, which was a policy of the British in the Simla Hill States, increased the scope for fraud and embezzlement by the State officials and the Rana. It was on these issues that the peasants agitated for a proper land revenue settlement conducted by non-State officials.¹⁵⁹

In this settlement, conducted between 1913 to 1916, the revenue demand on individual peasants was considerably reduced.¹⁶⁰ The total revenue of this hill state came to Rs 27,300 (Rs 21000 as land revenue, Rs 4,300 as commutation for Begar and Rs 2000 from various cesses).

156. National Herald dated Lucknow, 06.03.1940.

157. Letter No. 22-R/Misc. 13/41 from Political Agent, Punjab Hill States to Resident, Punjab States dated 06.01.1942, India Office Records: R/1/29/ 3163(A).

158. *Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States, 1910, Koti*, reprinted Delhi, 1995.

159. *Ibid.* Also see Political Department (Native States), A-Proceedings, May 1913, No. 24.; and Political Department (Native States), A-Proceedings, Aug 1913, No. 46.

160. *Land Revenue Settlement Report of Koti State, Simla Hills, 1916*, Lahore, 1918.

Even after the adoption of this settlement, friction between the Rana and his subjects continued, and there was a steady stream of complaints received by the British, but nothing which matched the scale of the earlier agitation which involved peasants from almost all the parganas of Koti. Then in 1939, there was a mass agitation of the landless agricultural labourers, called Bethus, who worked on the royal lands. This agitation deserves some attention since this was the first time that public action, autonomous of the Khash-Kanet, by the ritually inferior community of Koli landless labourers is recorded in the history of the region. This agitation also opens a window to the economic and social changes that were taking place in the Simla hill states, apart from the fact that it exhibited open politicisation of the landless labourers under the influence of some activists of the Himalayan Riyasati Praja Mandal.

Landless agricultural labourers were an integral part of the rural economy of the Western Himalayas as chapter two has discussed. They were mainly employed to cultivate the royal lands. They did not have to pay any land revenue, but were expected to pay the cesses that were imposed on all agriculturists. Apart from that, Begar levies were imposed on them and unlike the Khash-Kanet peasants, they could not relieve themselves of this physical burden by paying commutation fees.¹⁶¹ They were given a small plot of land to cultivate for their own subsistence, apart from some cattle, tools and wood and stones to build their houses, and small payments in kind during the commission of certain specific labours. They were tied to the land on which they worked and could not leave without the permission of the ruler. Notwithstanding the demands on their labour made on the royal fields and homes, they could be called at any time to attend to any of the needs of their masters.¹⁶²

There were four categories of Bethus to be found in the Western Himalayas, in general and in Koti, in particular. Almost all were attached to the royal lands on terms described in the previous paragraph. Some others, numbering 49 in 1946 in Koti, were attached to individual Khash-Kanet peasant families on terms similar to the

161. *Ibid.* Paras 25–26.

162. *Problems of the Koti Bethus*, Political Agent, Punjab Hill States to Resident Punjab States, India Office Records: R/1/29/2217. The following account is based on this document, unless otherwise stated.

royal Bethus. The third type of Bethus were artisans like carpenters, cobblers, etc. who were required to provide for the specific needs of the royal establishment in lieu of the land provided to them. All these categories of Bethus belonged to the Koli, Dom, Chamar, Tarkhan, and other menial groups of the region. The fourth category of Bethus were those Khash-Kanet peasants who held *Basa* land on service tenure similar to the Koli Bethus, but without having to provide menial labour in the royal establishment. Often the Bethus of the last category were poor peasants who had taken Beth tenures under debt obligations, and were in that sense, temporary *Bethus*, unlike the other three categories.

The two main markers of Beth tenure were the customary requirements to labour on their master's land and their obligation to provide labour services when demanded. They were classified in the British land settlements as tenants-at-will, unlike the Khash-Kanet peasants who were classified as occupancy tenants. It was easier to evict Bethus from the land they cultivated for their own subsistence, sometimes for many generations, than to evict Khash-Kanet peasants from land they had recently acquired because of the difference in their respective legal positions.¹⁶³ Similarly, the Bethus could not take loans on their land nor could they alienate it. In fact, it was not their land at all, but their masters, who gave it to them for their subsistence. In this sense the Beth tenure seems close to forms of serfdom in Europe.

In Koti, the total area under cultivation of Bethus was 6000 bighas, out of which 3,500 were for their own subsistence and the rest was

163. While the Bethus were tenants-at-will in the revenue records, the Khash-Kanet were recorded as occupancy tenants. The eviction of occupancy tenants by the State had to follow certain well-defined guidelines and had to satisfy equally well-defined conditions. The eviction of the Bethus from the land they tilled for their subsistence merely required the unilateral revocation of the Beth tenure by the owner of the Bethus and their land. This revocation of Beth demands by the Hill States and the Khash-Kanet peasants was made all the more easier by the pressure to end Beth tenures from the British who found it embarrassing since it came under the definition of slavery under the international treaties which the Government of India was a signatory to. See Aniket Alam, 'Unfree Labour Under Colonialism: Beth in the Shimla Hills', *Social Action*, Volume 46, No. 4, Oct.-Dec. 1996.

cultivated for the Rana and his family. The land under cultivation of Bethus for their subsistence was about 15% of the cultivated land in the State. While it was not as fertile as the land cultivated for the Rana, it was generally on low altitudes and provided one, often two good harvests. The average holding per Bethu of land given in subsistence, was 10 cultivated bighas. The proximity of Simla, which the State bordered, meant that many Koti *Bethus* had turned into what one British official describes as 'market gardeners' who cultivated vegetables and other cash crops for the Simla market.¹⁶⁴ They grew vegetables like potatoes, peas, french beans and fruits like apples, pears and apricots. An interesting sidelight on the nature of Koti Bethus is that just one shop in Simla sold vegetable seeds worth Rs 2,000 to them in 1939.¹⁶⁵

The size and constant demand of the Simla market assured a reasonably high price for these products. The Rana claimed no Bethu earned less than Rs 800 per year from the sale of these cash crops apart from what he grew for his subsistence, and that some Bethus earned as much as Rs 6000 annually. Even if one considers this estimate an exaggeration by the Rana to bolster his case during the course of the Bethu rebellion, this, along with the evidence of seed sales, indicates that the Bethus of Koti had integrated well with the market of agricultural products and were profiting from it.

It was in this context that the contradiction of a dependant peasantry moving up on the economic scale emerged and intensified, leading finally to the Bethus rebellion in Koti.

A few weeks before the incidents at Dhami began, on 12th June, 1939 to be precise, the Bethus of Koti struck work in 22 out of the 26 *Basas* where they provided agricultural labour.¹⁶⁶ Their main demand was that they should be allowed to pay land revenue instead of being forced to provide Beth-Begar labour. They also found the demands on them for services in the royal household oppressive and unjust. They also refused to give more than four hours labour on the Basa as was recorded in the *Wajib-ul-Arz* or the records of rights, drawn up

164. *Problems of the Koti Bethus*, op.cit.; also see *Enquiry Report on the Land Settlement of Koti State*, 1946, Himachal Pradesh State Archives.

165. *Problems of the Koti Bethus*, op.cit. para 12.

166. *Ibid.*

during the land settlement.¹⁶⁷ All the *Bethus* had stopped work collectively and refused to return till the others did, even though they denied having taken the divine oath as was done later in Dhami.¹⁶⁸ When the State officials refused to accept their demand of paying land revenue and being equated with the Khash-Kanet peasants, they started sending their land revenue 'dues' to the Superintendent Simla Hill States by money order. This seems to have been done on the advice of the Himalayan Riyasati Praja Mandal.

To the British and Koti officials the demands of the *Bethus* seemed tutored by the Congress, which had an active unit in Simla town. In fact, two *Bethus* of *Pajoy Basa* are claimed to have declared to Ramsay, the Assistant Political Agent of the Governor General in the Punjab hill states, '*Hukam sunya gaya tha ke Beth-Begar band hai, Congress ka hukam tha*' (we had heard orders that Beth Begar have been stopped; it was a Congress order).¹⁶⁹ Ramsay identified Kahn Singh Sautha, the brother of Bhag Mal Sautha and activist of the movement to reform marriage practices, as the 'principal instigator'. The main *Bethu* activist of this Beth-Begar 'strike' were identified as Koli Punno of *Basa Jaina*, Kolis Durga, Dillu and Laksonu of *Basa Sanul*, Kolis Mania, Chhajju and Jhattu of *Basa Kiar*, Koli Dharsia of *Basa Shirala* and Koli Burhia of *Basa Sadhora*. Many others who were also active were not mentioned in the official records, and thus one does not know of them.

The British and State officials rejected outright the demands of the *Bethus* of paying land revenue, claiming that it was legally unsustainable and neither was it based on the customs and traditions of the region. They claimed that Congress agitators had deliberately confused the issue of Beth, Begar and land revenue and provoked the illiterate *Bethus* to make unfounded and unsustainable demands to further their own political careers. Apart from the receipts of cesses paid, these *Bethus* had no proof to show that they had ever paid land

167. It has not been possible to refer to the document referred to here, but this seems to be surprising since those *Wajib-ul-Arz* (record of rights) that are available contain only the bare minimum with regard to the rights of the *Bethus*.

168. The divine oath of the Dagi-Koli *Bethus* would often be on deities which were specific to them and therefore outside the control of the pujaris and purohits of the Rana or the Khash-Kanet peasants.

169. *Problems of the Koti Bethus*, op.cit.

revenue. According to the land revenue settlement report, which had been accepted by the Bethus all these years, the services of the Bethus included cultivation of the Rana's Basa, carriage and disposal of its produce, collection and carriage of 10,000 maunds of wood annually, and grass 6,000 maunds annually to the Rana's residence and Begar.¹⁷⁰ Koti State required the daily attendance of 293 Begaris and since almost all the Khash-Kanet peasants paid the Begar commutation fee rather than give labour, the burden fell primarily on the Bethus, who had no option of paying commutation. The cesses that the Bethus were required to pay, and for which receipts were available, were in the nature of oil, wheat and cash for the Rana's elephant, maize and wheat for the *Thakurdwaras* besides 36 seers of ghee to the Rana's household.

The produce of 2,500 bighas of the Rana's Basa cultivated by the Bethus was valued at Rs 55,000 per year in 1916, not including the grass, wood, labour and cesses. The Rana also demanded and received rent on the 3,500 bighas of land cultivated by the Bethus for their own subsistence, and this rent totalled Rs 11,167 for 1916. It seems that it was this rent that the Bethus had to pay which prompted them to demand inclusion of their name in the rolls of occupancy tenants.¹⁷¹ This inclusion of rent on the land provided for the Bethus subsistence was a recent innovation to extract a share of the increased produce of the Bethus, who were now bettering their economic position by integrating with the market and loosening the economic dependence on their master.

This rebellion of the Koti Bethus, which merely consisted of a peaceful refusal to render labour services and pay rent on the land they cultivated, was finally subdued by the State authorities with the help of the British equally peacefully. After a series of meetings where Ramsay, the Assistant Political Agent too was present, to explain the legal position of the Bethus and the reasons for the refusal to let them pay land revenue instead of Beth-Begar levies proved unsuccessful, the Rana announced a fine of 2 annas per day for all those who did not work on the Basa lands or did not provide Beth-Begar.

This fine, coupled with the lack of further support from the Himalayan Riyasati Praja Mandal, which remained a body

170. *Land Revenue Settlement Report of Koti State, Simla Hills, 1916*, op.cit., para 21.

171. *Problems of the Koti Bethus*, op.cit.

representing the occupancy tenants – the Khash-Kanet peasants – both in its social composition and in its list of demands, led to the Bethus slowly returning to their work. Within two months of the beginning of their rebellion, almost all the Bethus were back to giving Beth-Begar levies and working on the Basa of the Rana. It was further announced that anyone who did not work in future would be ejected from the land and his house, which was on the Rana's land and was constructed with material provided by the Rana. Not much is given about the manner of pacification of the Bethus in the available records, and therefore no further details can be given.

This was perhaps the first time that the Bethus belonging to the Dagi-Koli communities of the Western Himalayas came out in open defiance of the authority of the State and publicly questioned their servile status. This was also the time that the demands for an end to Beth tenure were raised, both by the Bethus – who were supported by one section of the Praja Mandal leadership – and by a section of British officialdom. This led to serious attempts at 'reforming' this tenure along with the 'reforms' of Begar.¹⁷² The Dagi-Koli Bethus were still differentiated from the mass of the Khash-Kanet peasantry by various social and ritual disabilities. Their access to common property resources was negligible and their possession of land was extremely vulnerable. But the very fact of this rebellion and the demands raised gives evidence of the emergence of a peasantry within them. This development should be seen in conjunction with the decline of sections of the Khash-Kanet peasantry into landlessness and Beth tenure.¹⁷³ Due to the wide range of intense disabilities that this emergent class of Dagi-Koli peasants faced, they were, paradoxically, dependent almost entirely on the market for sustaining their position. Before discussing the political fallout of this emergent stratification within and across the Khash-Kanet and Dagi-Koli communities of the Western Himalayas, lets take a detour and study some of the social transformations and social reforms that engulfed the region parallel to these rebellions.

172. Aniket Alam, op.cit.

173. It should be kept in mind that landlessness here implies possession of land less than that required for the basic sustenance of the peasant family which necessitated taking Beth tenure or working in non-agricultural occupation in the towns by a majority of the brothers.

CHAPTER FIVE

Social Movements during British Rule

The social structure of the people living in the Western Himalayas was different from that found in the flat plains of the Punjab or the Ganges in some fundamental respects, as has been discussed at some length in the second chapter. Almost all the members of the ruling families of the various Hill States traced their ancestry to immigrants who came to these mountains in the historical period. They, along with some of the priestly families associated with temples dedicated to divinities of the Hindu pantheon, followed the caste and other social codes of orthodox Hinduism. The main agricultural communities were collectively known as the Kanets and were members of the Khash tribe, divided into various clans and lineages. Each of these clans and lineages traced their origin to some mythical hero who was akin to a divine being. Apart from these Khash-Kanets, there was a considerable population of artisans, menial workers and landless agricultural workers who were ritually and economically dependent on the ruling families, temples and the peasant communities. Their origin was traced to pre-Khash tribes who were supposedly defeated and socially subordinated by the Khash during the Vedic period.

In contrast to the ruling families and orthodox priests, these two groups were not strict about either caste practices or other rituals of orthodox Hinduism, as defined in the *Mitaksara* codes. While the social differentiation and distance between the *Khash-Kanets* and the servile populations were well marked, they did not yet amount to caste practices since many of the caste taboos were relatively weak and there

is no reference to caste or ritual purity in their oral sources. The primary identity remained one of lineage and clan. They did not follow the rules laid down for birth, marriage and death ceremonies, their divinities did not have any clear genealogical or theological link to the Hindu pantheon nor did they have a distinct priesthood.

It is possible to see a sharp difference between the social practices and religious beliefs of the ruling families and orthodox priests on the one hand, and the Khash-Kanet and the servile populations on the other. But this was not how the social landscape would be visible to the local people. The primary social division marked the servile groups and kept them outside the social mainstream, while there was a fair degree of social interaction between those who followed orthodox Hindu social practices and the Khash-Kanet, who did not. The relevant marker of difference was control over productive resources and political power, and not distinctions based on ritual or cultural practices.

There was one historical process that helped the social cohesion of the orthodox Hindu populations with the Khash-Kanets. This was the social decline, over time, in the social status of the descendants of the junior members of the royal families and of defeated rulers. Over time most of them merged into the mass of peasant cultivators, both culturally and economically, but often kept some memories and traditions of their former glory alive which distinguished their ancestry. The orthodox Hindu populations, small as they were, had control of the Hill States and some large, dominant deities and their temples which gave them both control over resources and political power. The Khash-Kanet had their strong clan institutions, a strong network of related deities and actual control over land and resources.

On the other hand, the servile population did not have either any primary claim to natural resources or access to political power, and were thus totally dependent on their social superiors for survival. It also needs to be noted that the Khash-Kanet populations were incorporated into the institutions of the Hill States, for two reasons. First, they provided manpower to the ruling dynasties. Second, the establishment of the Hill States were a process, usually long and tortuous, of defeating and subordinating the political institution of the Khash-Kanets; a process which always included some amount of compromise with their authority. Parallel to this was the acceptance

of the King or his patron deity as the primary divinity of the population of the State, converting the clan deities into its vassals.

There was, thus, an intermeshing of the personnel and institutions of these two distinct demographic groups. This reinforced the power of both the ruling dynasties and the clans vis-à-vis those who were outside it. But this should not be taken to imply that power sharing was equitably distributed. The Hill State was dependent on the clan institutions and deity for the exercise of its power but it was definitely the superior in the relation. Conversely, the clan institutions and deity could force the Hill State to incorporate them and their personnel at the lower levels but could not overthrow its dominance. This relation of subordination and domination between the Hill States and the clans was evident in the control of productive resources and was reflected in the nature of their ritual relations.

The third chapter has discussed the relative growth in importance and power of the Hill States over other local political institutions with the coming of the British. This chapter shall describe how this refracted sociologically on to the communities in the Western Himalayas and influenced their reactions to colonialism.

The Hill State was recognised by the British as the only legitimate political institution. Even in areas of the Western Himalayas where the British usurped the authority of the Hill States, they considered themselves the political inheritors of these States. Chapters three and four have discussed in length the manner in which the Hill States were strengthened vis-à-vis the other political institutions and that this was a historically unprecedented event. This meant that while the power and authority of the *Raja*, *Rana* or *Thakur* of the Hill States was buffeted, the legal authority and power of clan institutions like the *Khumri* and the authority of the clan deity were undermined. They could no longer remain legitimate political players. Their political power had derived from their function as the collective voice of the clan or lineage, and as the forum where their constitutive units interacted for dividing productive resources, wealth and demands from the State. These functions were taken away from them and added to the powers of the Hill States and the British Government. Whether it was the land settlements, the forest settlements, the extension of the Punjab Customary Law and other legal codes instituted by the British, both the use and the authority of these traditional bodies of political

organisation at the grassroots were rendered obsolete and illegitimate. Markets and cash were the other agents that destroyed the legitimacy of these institutions by undermining their function as distributors of resources, labour and surplus.

Clan institutions like the *Khumri* were based on the unity of the lineage that was expressed through the spiritual and temporal power of the clan deity. The rituals of the deity reaffirmed the bonding within the community expressed through the concept of *bhaichara*, or brotherhood. Subjects of the same deity, all were like its children and thus siblings. Thus, they represented an extended family, marriage possible only outside the lineage and spouse-sharing, or polyandry, possible only within the lineage. Revenue and labour demands of the Hill State, before and during the initial period of British rule, were levied on this community or *bhaichara* and not on the individuals or families constituting it. This community organised around the lineage and clan, claiming origin from and loyalty to a single deity or divine ancestor, was thus the only unit around which political processes were organised for the Himalayan peasant. It not only provided the structure for relating to other political entities, but also represented the core of their political identity. The earlier chapters have noted that the innovations brought about by the British were usually loyal to the traditional *form* while changing and redefining the *content* of institutions and relations.

Thus, there were no radical breaks that were experienced by the populations of the Western Himalayas. It was only when the contradiction inherent in the continuation of old forms for new political, legal and economic regimes became impossible to contain, that there were rebellions and a conscious effort at change in the form. This process was necessarily protracted and the effects of British interventions were thus staggered. One important consequence of this slow unfolding of changes was that institutions like the *Khumri* and the *Goor* continued as active agents in the affairs of the clan and its members. It was within these traditions and institutional remains of the clans' political organisation that many of the later resources of peasant mobilisation emerged during the twentieth century.

The Sanads that were granted by the British to the conquered Hill States in 1816 and 1817 had clauses which banned Sati, female infanticide, slave holding or dealing, exhorted the building of roads

and bridges, and laid down the responsibility of the rulers towards the welfare of their subjects. The rulers of the Hill States did not adhere to many of these social clauses, nor did the British insist on their compliance. The lack of roads and other means of communication hampered the British but still the clause about the building of roads remained a dead letter. The Begar demands were made much in excess of what was stipulated in the Sanads, even though there was regular statements recorded by various officers responsible for the affairs of the region, about the wretchedness of the system. The only clause that actually seems to have been followed pertained to the banning of Sati, where some references can be found about British officers dissuading widowed Ranis from committing the act.¹

Some minor social reforms began in and around the British settlements like Simla, Kasauli and a few Christian missionary establishments were started in places like Kotgarh.² The attempts at direct social reforms and proselytising were sporadic and the effects minimal. None of these attempts could relate to the needs of the people they were addressing and could not build popular support for themselves, which reflected in the near absence of local leaders and activists among the missionaries, whose was the only organised attempt at social reform.

The schools that were started in the British settlements became another route for the entry of new ideas about social and cultural values among the hill people.³ By the 1860s and 1870s there were other institutions like medical dispensaries that had started operating not only in the British tracts but also in many of the larger Hill States.⁴ The working of the markets, the live contact of an increasingly large number of peasants with Hindus and Muslims from the plains, etc. also opened up the world of ideas and possibilities for people who had otherwise had the most minimal of historical contact with outsiders. This intrusion of alien social and cultural practices and

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1. As in Mandi at the death of Raja Balbir Sen in 1851, Manmohan, op.cit., pg. 117.
 2. *Gazetteer of the Simla District, 1888–1889*, reprinted Delhi, 1992, pg. 116.
 3. *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42. *Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States, 1910, Bushahr*, reprinted Delhi, 1995, (henceforth *Bushahr, 1910*), pg. 79.
 4. *Gazetteer of the Simla District, 1888–1889*, pg. 88. Also *Bushahr, 1910*, pg. 80.

ideologies came along with a package of political, administrative, legal and economic measures, which almost completely overhauled not only the inter-connected structures of material practices, but also the conceptual universe, of the Himalayan peasants. This exhibited itself in the various social reforms that were taken up by sections of the local population in the twentieth century, and are documented in official records.

An indigenous desire to reform and re-cast themselves in the likeness of the people of the plains too developed among the populations of the Western Himalayas. Its earliest and least mediated expression came in the efforts of the deity Mahasu to 'conquer' other deities and force people into submission to its spiritual rule and code of social conduct.

The Conquering Army of Mahasu

The fact that every clan and territorial unit of settlement had its own patron deity has already been noted. Apart from this, there were special deities who were linked to specific geographical features, like natural springs or other water sources, forests, natural forces and also to specific diseases like small pox.⁵ The supernatural world was a complex of hierarchically placed beings, which included deities related to the orthodox Hindu pantheon, local gods, spirits, and charmed animals, rocks and trees. Some observers have rightly classified this religious world as animistic.⁶ There were no abstract gods and each deity had a clearly defined domain, subjects and geographical territory. *The history of every deity was usually the history of its subjects.* Thus, one finds innumerable tales about the quarrels between these deities, their aligning and falling out with each other, their travels from one valley to another and similar other adventures.⁷

These supernatural beings were fallible like their human followers and often one finds traditions, where one deity is defeated and killed

5. H.W. Emerson, *Typescript of Unpublished Anthropological Study of Mandi and Bashahr*, H.W. Emerson Personal Papers, OIOC, Chapter VI.

6. *Ibid.*

7. The best sources for these accounts are H.A. Rose, *Glossary of the Tribes and Castes of the Punjab and the Northwest Frontier*, Lahore, 1893; and H.W. Emerson, op.cit.

or imprisoned by another with the followers of the vanquished deity accepting the spiritual lordship of the conqueror. Such is the tale of Mahasu. The available records do not tell us the exact dates of the advent and spread of the cult of Mahasu. But it might be useful to recount the brief outlines of his origin and career.⁸

In the valley of the Pabur River, a tributary of the Tons and the chief stream of the secluded but agriculturally rich Rohru valley of Bushahr State, a group of malevolent gods were making life difficult for the inhabitants. Apart from excessive demands of goods and labour, they also demanded regular human sacrifice from the people. One Brahmin of the area had seven sons and these malevolent gods had taken six as sacrifice. Fearing for the life of the seventh and last son, the Brahmin's wife forced the old man to go and find some divine relief at the temple of Hatkoti, where an incarnation of goddess Durga resided. Knowing that no known power was strong enough to stop the malevolent gods from taking away his last son, the Brahmin went reluctantly at his wife's bidding. At Hatkoti he was told by the oracle of the goddess that the only deity who could successfully challenge these malevolent spirits was a deity called Mahasu who resided in Kashmir. One version of the story claims that the old man made the trip to Kashmir, the other claims that when he climbed the hill overlooking Hatkoti temple, he magically found himself in a strange land, which he identified with Kashmir. The end result was that he was able to convey his despair to the great Mahasu, who promised relief from the malevolent gods to the pious Brahmin. Mahasu commanded him to return to his village and make a plough of silver with a gold tip, with which he was to plough his lands every Sunday. On the seventh ploughing, Mahasu promised to come with his army and destroy the demons.

The old man returned and did as he was bid. But on the sixth Sunday, while he was ploughing his field, his plough got stuck and on pulling, a golden idol emerged. This was Mahasu. As the Brahmin pulled out the idol from the furrowed field, hundreds of gold, silver and bronze images emerged from the furrows – the army of Mahasu.

8. The account of Mahasu is primarily taken from H.A. Rose, op.cit., pp. 302–315. Supplementary material is taken from H.W. Emerson, op.cit., Chapters IV and V.

Soon this army defeated and destroyed all those supernatural powers that were harassing the people of the Pabur valley. Mahasu established himself at a place called Hanol, in the bordering Hill State of Garhwal, close to the watershed between the Pabur and the Tons rivers. He has traditionally been a haughty and powerful god, respected by his devotees and feared by his neighbours.

At some point in the second half of the nineteenth century, Mahasu became aggressive towards all the other deities of the region. He would travel to the domain of other deities, harass the latter's followers till they forsook their own deity and unconditionally accepted him as their primary deity.

His modes of entry into other domains were innumerable. He would attach himself to some article or person from among his subjects and travel with it/them. These articles could range from cattle, food, clothes, money, stones, etc. just to name a few. Often he would attach himself to a newly wed bride when she went to her husband's house outside his area of influence.

He made his presence felt by a series of accidents, calamities and diseases which afflicted his unknowing hosts. The listed methods of Mahasu' harassment of his unwilling hosts included crop failure, storms and unseasonal snowfall, landslides and house collapses, small-pox, epilepsy, fits and trances, sudden deaths, etc. Most of these calamities were inexplicable by the standards of the Himalayan peasantry. This was Mahasu's way of letting his hosts know his spiritual conquest of their traditional deity, whose loss of power was apparent in the fact that it could not stop these calamities falling on its subjects.

The only remedy at this point was for the victims to collectively accept the superiority of Mahasu, build a new shrine to him – which had to be bigger than the one dedicated to the older deity – and also divert the largest share of food, cash and labour made by the community to its various deities. He would not require the banishment of the vanquished deity, like in earlier times, but the heavy demands on the resources and labour of the peasants made by Mahasu meant that over time the neglect of the traditional deity would be complete.

Some of the deities gave in meekly, others fought a pitched battle for their turf, but the winner was always Mahasu even if it took him

some time to accomplish his victory. One of his principal rivals was a deity named Shalu with whom he had one of the fiercest struggles.⁹ This struggle with Shalu gives us some interesting, but incomplete, clues about the historical role played by Mahasu in the reorganisation of the ideological world of the Himalayan peasant.

The origin of Mahasu is based on a legend that has agriculture as its central motif, as can be seen in the account given above. The origin of Shalu is pastoral.¹⁰ It is said that once many generations ago, shepherds in one particular alpine pasture found one ram transfixed to a rock. When they tried to remove the animal they found it impossible, so they cut its head off. Below the body of the ram, they found two dazzling images of an unknown god. One of the images rolled away down the valley, fell into a stream and flowed away, lost to the pursuing shepherds. The other was brought back to the village. The *Goor* declared this to be the image of a new god – Shalu.

Over the years Shalu became a popular deity over a large tract in the region of the Simla hills and was venerated in many valleys forming what has been called a ‘confederacy of villages’. Shepherds also performed the main rites of Shalu and his greatest popularity was with this group. This difference in origin did not mean that they were purely gods of pastoralism and agriculture, respectively. Both had followers who practised a combination of agricultural, pastoral and gathering activities, but this difference does provide some clues for further investigation.

What is of interest is that with the establishment and stabilisation of land and forest settlements and the introduction of money on a large scale, agriculture became more paying than ever. The income from labour in the forest operations and in the British towns combined with the former to reduce the importance of pastoralism for the Himalayan household. Parallel to this is seen the ascendancy of a deity with unambiguous agricultural origins and vague links to the Hindu pantheon over a deity that is clearly pastoral in its origins. The sources at present do not allow generalisation beyond this. What one can state with some certainty is that Mahasu was able to successfully ‘conquer’ much of this watershed area comprising the present day areas of

9. H.A. Rose, op.cit., pp. 307–10.

10. H.A. Rose, op.cit., pp. 311–312; H.W. Emerson, op. Cit., Chapter, IV.

Simla, Solan, Sirmaur and Tehri Garhwal. So spectacular was his success that in the post independence political reorganisation, the undivided districts of Simla and Solan were called Mahasu!

Another of Mahasu's enemies was the god Chasralu. The struggle between them was intense and bitter. Though Chasralu put up a valiant fight, he was defeated by Mahasu and chased through the valleys and mountains¹¹. Injured and pursued, Chasralu hid inside a cave. Mahasu could not enter and kill him, so he laid siege to the cave for many years. Finally, he left leaving five of his subordinate gods to guard the five possible approaches to the cave. These smaller deities, who had taken upon themselves the task of guarding Chasralu, were given undisputed charge of the territory where they kept watch, Mahasu promising them that he would not interfere in their domain.

Even though Chasralu was thus confined to a cave, he was respected and worshipped for his powers. One oracle was associated with his cave and people from far came to him for redress and solutions to their problems. Special annual festivals were held at the cave which were heavily attended and which were used to divine the prospects of the coming agricultural season. The nature of the harvest, the possibility of disease and pestilence, the death of some people, the birth of children and the location of hidden treasures were all prophesied by this oracle of Chasralu.

Sometime in the late nineteenth century one devotee of Mahasu, a man feared widely for his knowledge of magic and supernatural powers, declared that Chasralu was no longer in the cave.¹² He came to the tracts where the five warders of Chasralu were worshipped and claimed back their domains for Mahasu, since these territories were given to them for the specific purpose of guarding Chasralu. He did not blame the warders because according to him Chasralu had not escaped, but had dissipated into thin air. Therefore, there was no longer any need for guarding the cave and their former master Mahasu would now come and resume his direct rule. The subjects of the five guardian gods were very angry at this wanton breach of contract by Mahasu and came out armed with sticks and other weapons. They drove out Mahasu's messenger with a warning that if

11. The account is in H.A. Rose, op.cit., pp. 305–306.

12. *Ibid.*, pg. 307.

either he or his god were to come into their territory, they would be shown no mercy.¹³ But since that day terrible calamities are reported to have continuously befallen these villagers, who, at the time of compiling reports for the Punjab Census of 1883, had stopped visiting Chasralu's cave for fear of Mahasu's wrath. They finally accepted the rule of Mahasu by the time Emerson visited these areas, in the second decade of the twentieth century.

What is noteworthy about this divine conqueror of the mountains, is that the social practices and religious rites favoured by him mark a clear departure from the traditions of Himalayan theophany.¹⁴ These social practices were similar to those practised by caste Hindus of the North Indian plains and there was an explicit reference to Mahasu being an 'incarnation' of Shiva.

Mahasu abhorred the sight of blood, animal sacrifice or meat eating. While this was not totally dispensed with by his devotees, specially those who were involuntary neo-converts, they did this outside his sight. He did accept these offerings but only at night, and well outside his temple. Similar was his dislike of liquor. While his followers did drink, and much to excess at that, they were not allowed into his temple in an inebriated condition. Also women were strongly discouraged from drinking. He liked his devotees taking regular baths, was attended by accredited Brahmins, kept 'purdah' from his lay followers and heavily taxed his subjects in food and labour. Many of his rituals were closer to the orthodox Hindu practices than to what was common in the region, and he was often identified as an incarnation of Maha-Shiva. He had five *Wazeers* whose idols accompanied him always and the villagers had to take care of them along with the deity. The main idol of the god, actually four brothers identified as one, went on a tour of his domain once, sometimes twice, a year. At these times, the villagers had to feast his party of human servants, oracles, *Pujari* and followers. They also had to individually and as a community, give him presents in cash and kind. These

13. H.W. Emerson has a long and detailed account of the travails of one of these guardian deities called Jakh of Janglik village, op.cit., Chapter X.

14. H.A. Rose, op.cit., pp. 314–315. 'Theophany' refers to the visible manifestations of a deity in the rituals and practices of its followers. The manner in which it is socially revealed to its followers.

offerings to the main deity were in excess of what they had to provide daily to its representative in the village temple.

A comparison of Mahasu's theophany with that of some normal Himalayan deity, like Shalu, would show the nature of departures that were effected by the introduction of his worship. Shalu, while claiming the allegiance of everyone, was closely associated with pastoralism and shepherds. His main rituals involved the participation of shepherds but there was no hard and fast rule about it. Anyone who was a subject of the deity could worship it. Its association with pastoralism also meant that it was not only fond of eating meat but regularly demanded sacrifices of rams and sheep, both at the beginning and end of the pastoral and agricultural cycle. There was no taboo on liquor and neither was it discouraged among his female subjects. There was no large establishment of smaller deities, called *Wazeers* or any other name, that he carried around with him, and nor did he have a large human staff permanently in attendance. Thus, his demands on the resources of his subjects were neither as steep nor as fixed as it was with Mahasu. He was also not jealous of his subjects' allegiance to other divinities and did not demand exclusive loyalty, as long as they carried out their responsibilities towards him. He was also not aggressive against his neighbouring divinities since he was content with his domain being confined to a 'confederacy of villages'.

The adventures of Mahasu provide incomplete, yet tantalising clues about the changes that were being wrought in the social and economic life of the Himalayan people. It is tempting to state that this was the first indication of the Himalayan peasant attempting to change his conceptual universe, which was increasingly proving inadequate to comprehend the new world intruding into their mountains, with the coming of the British. But on the basis of the available evidence, it may not be possible to do so. What can be stated is that this spectacular spread of Mahasu, and the eclipse of other deities, was a process parallel to the changes that were brought about by land settlements, forest leases, the growth of British towns and their markets, and to the intrusion of orthodox Hindus and their practices in a manner which was unprecedented for the region.

There does seem, *prima facie*, some weak functional link between the new theophany of Mahasu and the structures of economy and patterns of social life that were making their presence felt at this time.

Seen together with the more active and evident response of the Himalayan peasantry in the various rebellions discussed previously, they provide a more comprehensive picture. The necessity of changing the traditional patterns of surplus appropriation in the context of an expanding market, where Begar was fast becoming a twin burden – reducing the labour available on the family farm and denying the peasant money he would otherwise have earned in forest labour or in Simla – became a constant feeder into the recurrent rebellions. These rebellions also highlighted the changed nature of political relations, which was first realised by the rulers of the Hill States and later by the British. It was much later, in the second and third decade of the twentieth century, that the peasantry too comprehended this transformation and worked out ways to deal with it. The rebellions that were discussed earlier served to highlight the contradiction that lay at the heart of the political and economic system that was inaugurated by the British.

The political power of the Hill State was strengthened by British paramountcy and its economic base made secure by land settlements and forest leases. The peasantry, which lost the political leverage it exercised over its rulers, gained proprietorship in land and the ability to tap economic resources outside their community through entering the growing markets both as suppliers of goods and labour and as buyers of commodities, including rudimentary capital goods, which were unavailable in their region. The emergence of a market even in land marked their new identity as proprietary peasants and laid the basis for eventual class stratification within socially homogenous clans and communities. This transformation provided a basis for the emergence and spread of new ideas, which could underpin the new social reality, Mahasu's adventures being the first and perhaps most unconscious of them. Later, in the twentieth century, the focus of reform movements shifted from purely religious/mythological to social practices underpinned by religion, like polyandry or group marriage, caste status and clan affiliation, and the related question of Begar.

Before studying these, it would perhaps be useful to have a look at the trends in demography, education, occupational shifts and employment patterns.

Changing Social Indicators

At the time of the British conquest of the Western Himalayas, it would be safe to suggest, that literacy was negligible. Except for some trading groups and certain members of ruling families and high priests, almost nobody knew how to read, and of the few who had this skill, even fewer knew how to write. Even this extremely limited literacy was related to the matters directly concerning the livelihood of the person; accounting and trade related communication in the case of traders and knowledge of certain religious texts in the case of priests.

Schools were slow to start in the region. It was only after the construction of the Hindustan-Tibet Road in the 1850s that large-scale civilian populations of Europeans went up into the mountains for purposes of extended stay, and only after this was the need for schools felt. It must be added that almost all of these early schools were meant for the children of British officers whose families now accompanied them to the Hill Stations. Some local children, whose parents had converted to Christianity, were also admitted in these schools but their number was very low. Around this time certain Christian Missionary institutions also started their own schools for non-European populations, especially in rural areas directly administered by the British.

The first and the most persevering of these missionary efforts in education were by the Baptist Mission Church in Simla. Their avowed aim was to enable hill people to read the Bible in the vernacular, and thus spread the word of god in the region.¹⁵ Therefore, they were not too unhappy that most of their pupils left unceremoniously after the completion of their primary education in the ‘three Rs’.¹⁶ This school was opened in 1866 and endeavoured to provide enough education in the vernaculars and in English which would enable the students to find employment in Government offices as peons, ‘record daftaris’, or in the Government press as compositors, apart from enabling them

15. All the information on the Baptist Mission School is taken from *Gazetteer of the Simla District, 1888–89*, reprinted Delhi, 1992, (henceforth *Simla 1888–89*) pp. 41–42.

16. “Three Rs” were a commonly used term for basic literacy in the 19th century. It denotes Reading, Writing and Arithmetic; the ‘R’ being the most prominent sound in all three words.

to read the Bible. They also had boarding facilities for some hill children, though the maximum they had till the publication of the Simla Gazetteer was 18 residents. Many more studied in the day school and more than 40 students had graduated from the school by 1879, apart from those who left midway. In that year the school had a staff of 4 teachers, 50 male students and 6 female students. The Gazetteer records that pupils belonged to all classes of society including Kanet and Koli children apart from Brahmins and Rajputs. Care was taken to provide food cooked only by a Brahmin cook and parents were allowed to inspect the facilities.

Among the Hill States it was Sirmaur which was perhaps the first to systematically start schools in its territory. The Simla District Gazetteer records that already by 1888 there was more than one primary school in the State, with plans for one more.¹⁷ This trend seems to have continued, because the 1934 Sirmaur State Gazetteer records the existence of primary schools in six places, two middle schools and one high school at Nahan that was affiliated with the Punjab University.¹⁸ There was also a girl's high school at this time. What is most noteworthy is that primary education was free for all Sirmaur subjects, and maybe this enlightened education policy helped create a whole section of educated Kanet and Rajput agriculturists, who later took over the leadership of the Praja Mandal agitation in the late 1930s. But in most other Hill States education came late. Some of the subjects of these Hill States managed to get some education in schools run in Simla and other British territories. But this number had to be very small, and limited to those sections which had a combination of both economic and labour surplus in their families, which would enable them to spare at least one male member for the relatively unproductive task of school education. There also seems to be some prejudice against school education among the Himalayan population, and they are reported in one source to equate school attendance with Begar labour!¹⁹

17. *Ibid.*, pg. 16.

18. *Sirmaur State Gazetteer, 1934*, Part A, reprinted Delhi, 1996, pg. 119.

19. The *Census of India, 1881*, Vol. 18 Punjab, Part I, (henceforth *Punjab Census, 1881*), pg. 405, writes about Kullu: "Still here [Lahaul], as in Kullu, education is considered a species of begar, and the father expects to be exempted from carrying loads & c., while his son is at school. In Kullu

In the Simla Gazetteer of 1888–89, 281 children of Hindu parents are shown as registered students in Government and Government aided schools in Simla district. Of these 188 were the children of agriculturists, or the rural population.²⁰ The 1881 Census records 10.17 per cent males and 1.98 per cent of the rural population as literate or under instruction.²¹ This figure should be seen in tandem with the rise in the percentage of educated in the district in the second half of the nineteenth century. While in 1868, 12.03 percent of the total male population of Simla district, including the town, was literate, by 1881 this percentage increased to 19.46.²² Corresponding figures for the Kangra district were 3.43 percent in 1868 and 6.80 percent in 1881.²³

These figures do not illustrate the exact position of the rural population of the mountainous regions, since they include the population of Simla town in the former and the historically distinct Kangra valley with its links to Punjab in the latter. But these figures do provide an indication that literacy was increasing, though slowly, in the mountainous regions as a whole. In the Kotkhai and Kotgarh Ilaqa of Simla district, which were totally rural, the total population was 9847 in 1881 with 368 literate people.²⁴ In the Kullu sub-division of Kangra district, for the same year, the total population was 108,981 with 2,043 literate people²⁵ or only 1.87% of the population. By 1891,

there are two schools; but they would have very few scholars were not the parents encouraged by exemption from begar to send their children". It is not clear whether education is actually considered a species of Begar or the exemption is claimed on the basis of education symbolising a social status incommensurate with Begar demands, since till the arrival of the British education and literacy was the preserve of ruling families, high priests and traders tracing their roots to the plains. It is surprising and disconcerting that no other records refer to this belief about school education and therefore, not much can be written about it.

20. *Simla 1888–89*, pg. 43.
21. *Punjab Census, 1881*, Abstract No. 128, 'Educated Proportion of Population'.
22. *Ibid.* Abstract No. 130, 'Male Education between 1868 and 1881'.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.* Supplementary Table – A.
25. *Ibid.*

this percentage had risen to 4.32,²⁶ which, though still small, indicates to us that education was beginning to spread among groups which were not traditionally literate. This same source indicates that schools in Kullu proper were not well attended and that the peasants of the Saraj area, which was agriculturally much less productive, 'eagerly avail themselves of the advantages of the primary school at Banjar and the zamindari school at Nirmand'. Students from the Saraj region also seem to form a high proportion of the students at the Sultanpur (Kullu town) school. A larger proportion of them are reputed to be acquainted with the *Nagri* script in comparison to Kullu where the characters employed were generally the "more barbarous" *Tankri*, a local script.²⁷ All those who were recorded as knowing English in this sub-division of Kangra district were either Englishmen or officials of the Punjab Government. It may also be useful to look at the literacy figures for two of the most important and numerous agricultural castes of the Western Himalayas, the Kanets and the Dagi-Kolis (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Comparative Literacy Rates Among Kanets and Dagi-Kolis 1891 AND 1931.²⁸

	1891				1931			
	Kanet		Dagi-Koli		Kanet		Dagi-Koli	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total	192463	177291	88466	81301	132574	122045	78221	70865
Literate	5963	195	416	2	6540	85	726	36
Know English	84	00	10	00	387	2	58	2
Percentage								
Literate	3.09	0.05	0.47	0.00	4.93	0.07	0.93	0.05

26. *Gazetteer of the Kangra District, Part II – Kullu, 1897*, (henceforth *Kullu, 1897*) republished New Delhi, 1994, pg. 53.

27. *Ibid.*, pg. 54.

28. *Census of India*, 1891, Punjab, Vol. 1, Appendix 'C', Abstracts Nos. 61 & 84; *Census of India*, 1931, Punjab, Part II, Table XIV.

A few qualifications about the figures in the table:

a. There is a marked decline in the population of Kanets from 1891 to 1931. This is because during this period efforts had already begun among Kanets to get themselves classified as Rajputs. Some of them, who could trace their origin to established Rajput families got themselves recorded as Rajputs. Some others, who were higher than usual in the political hierarchy of their clans, got themselves declared Rajputs and thus managed to change their caste in the census. Thus, the peasants who were returned as Kanet in the 1931 census were those who were relatively lower in both the social-political hierarchy and in their control of economic resources. This would partly explain the low increase in the number of literates among them over these four decades.

b. The decline in the population of Dabis and Kolis is explained by the fact that some groups which were considered a part of them in 1891 were classified as distinct sub-castes in 1931 and also because the enumeration of these castes was much more precise in the later census.

These figures indicate that in the four decades covered by them, the literacy level among Kanet males rose from 3.09% of the population of the caste to 4.93% of the population of the caste, while for Dagi-Koli males, this percentage rose from 0.47 to 0.93. The actual difference between these two groups in relation to their access to education was more but since it is not possible to account for those of the Kanets, who had in this period recorded themselves as Rajputs (or even Brahmins), no precise figure can be given.

Another method of looking at this issue of the rise in the literacy and education of the agricultural communities, both Kanet and Koli, would be to look at the rise in the literacy levels in some of the representative Hill States of the region between 1881 to 1931.

It is evident from the above figures that education levels did see a noticeable rise in all the hill states falling in the valleys of the Beas, Sutlej and Tons rivers. This rise in literacy was not of some high magnitude and also occurred over five decades, so that its impact should not be overestimated. But certain propositions can be advanced on the basis of the figures available to us.

First, the rise in literacy and education indicated by these figures was mostly confined to the Khash-Kanet peasantry. This assertion can

Table 5.2: Rural Literacy in Some Hill States, 1881 and 1931.²⁹

Hill states	1881					
	Literate		Illiterate		Percentage of literacy	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Mandi	1895	13	70858	69039	3.42	0.04
Chamba	1196	6	55903	53224	3.02	0.05
Sirmaur	1868	12	58243	46864	4.05	0.07
Bilaspur	1908	10	44967	39403	4.07	0.03
Bushahr	750	36	32172	31290	2.38	0.11
Suket	1356	23	27247	23005	4.81	0.19
Keonthal	472	31	16804	13788	2.73	0.22
Jubbal	100	5	10491	8586	0.94	0.06
Other hill states	1686	97	43671	37635	3.58	0.26

Hill states	1931					
	Literate		Illiterate		Percentage of literacy	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Mandi	9144	622	98732	98967	8.48	0.62
Chamba	4269	341	71790	70470	5.61	0.48
Sirmaur	4370	423	78014	65761	5.30	0.64
Bilaspur	2420	100	50734	47740	4.55	0.21
Bushahr	2268	62	49325	52734	4.40	0.12
Suket	1126	55	29725	27502	3.65	0.20
Keonthal	2248	183	23486	22176	8.74	0.82
Jubbal	694	41	13813	12624	4.78	0.32
Other hill states	4691	395	48365	47730	8.84	0.82

29. *Census of India*, 1881, Punjab, Vol. 3, Table No. XIII; *Census of India*, 1931, Punjab, Part II, Table XIII.

be made on two grounds. The ruling families, trading castes and other dominant groups composed a very small fraction of the total population of the Hill States and most of them were in any case, literate during the Census of 1881. Therefore, the rise in literacy could not reflect changes in these groups beyond a very small percentage. The other ground for this assertion is that apart from the Khash-Kanets the only other segment of the population were the artisans, menial groups and agricultural labourers, and Table 1 shows that only 0.92% of Dagi-Koli males and 0.05% of females were literate even in 1931. Thus, it seems a safe assertion to make that the rise in literacy over the half century between 1881 to 1931 was confined mostly to the Khash-Kanet peasantry.

The second proposition that can be made on the basis of the above figures concerns the nature of literacy within the Khash-Kanets. Chapters three and four have discussed the emergence of stratification within the clans of Khash-Kanet peasantry in the nineteenth century. From the social requirements for literacy that seems to be important at that time, the ability to stay away from the homestead at some school appears to be paramount. Thus, it was only those families that could spare their son(s) for some years from the demands of family labour that could, most readily, access education facilities. This would indicate the greater spread of education among those Khash-Kanet who had moved up the economic ladder during the process of stratification. While making this point, it needs to be reminded that many of these upwardly mobile Khash-Kanet had also managed to get themselves classified as Rajputs and Brahmins, and thus would not be represented in the figures quoted above. Still this seems to be a trend reflected even in the figures available.

In studying the emergence of social reforms and political awakening among the Khash-Kanet, it would also be useful to correlate the status of literacy and education with other social trends. Two of these seem to be of special interest in highlighting the inflow of new ideas and forms of organisation into the region's population. One, the greater interaction between the populations of the Western Himalayas with Europeans and Indians from outside, and two, the increasing gap between their traditional caste profession and their principal means of livelihood. But before discussing these two trends,

Table 5.3: Variation in Population From 1891 to 1931.³⁰

Hill States	1891	1931	Percentage Rise (from 1891 to 1931)
Mandi	166923	207465	24.29
Chamba	124032	146870	18.41
Sirmaur	124134	148568	19.68
Bilaspur	91760	100994	10.06
Bushahr	75727	104389	37.84
Suket	52403	58408	11.46
Keonthal	37320	48093	28.87
Jubbal	21412	27172	26.90
Other hill states	278440	330850	18.82

one look at the trends in population growth needs to be taken (Table 5.3).

As has been noted in Chapters one and two, there are no statistical data to compare with the pre-British or even early British period. But if the features of the region's geography, economy and social structure described in these chapters are correct, it is feasible to assume an absence of any growth in population at that time. If this was not a correct assumption, then the forms of family, the structure of agricultural and pastoral production and the institutions of the Hill States would all have been different from what one finds. In the table 3 a secular growth in population over four decades is indicated and this shows that the structures of agricultural production were definitely changing. Apart from this an increase in the resources that were available to the people of the region is also indicated, as otherwise it would be difficult to explain the basis of this population growth. It is interesting to note that the highest growth in population, apart from Mandi, was in Bushahr and Jubbal, two Hill States which show low level of literacy in 1881 but which improved at rates faster than their neighbours. In Chapter one it was shown that the total cultivable area, as well as the total cultivated area, both did not rise

30. *Census of India*, 1931, Punjab, Part II, Table II.

during the colonial period by any margin comparable to the rise in population. It is obvious that the introduction of markets and the possibility of earning money both by commercialisation of agricultural production and by labour in the towns, increased the possibilities for the expansion of the family, both by splitting into nuclear units and by an increase in the numbers.

This process of population growth was paralleled by another process, whereby there was an unravelling of the traditional occupational structure. More and more people were getting into occupations which were very different from that practised by their ancestors, and often this new occupation became their main source of livelihood. Along with this, an ever-increasing number of people were moving out of their ancestral village to other regions in the Western Himalayas or even outside. On the other hand, people from outside the Western Himalayas and from other regions of the Western Himalayas were coming to live for extended periods in areas that had historically seen no significant movements of population. While the figures given in the Table 5.4 may seem unremarkable, it must be

Table 5.4: Birth Place of Population of Selected Hill States, 1931.³¹

Hill state	Within state of enumeration			Outside state within Punjab			Outside Punjab within India		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	M	F	Total	M	F
Mandi	192424	98527	93897	11306	6038	5268	2833	2496	337
Chamba	142446	73404	69042	2379	1419	960	1747	1024	723
Sirmaur	135426	74583	60843	10155	5936	4219	2602	1550	1052
Bilaspur	93672	50967	42704	7294	2165	5129	22	16	6
Bushahr	103752	51222	52530	440	251	189	181	107	74
Suket	55768	29381	26387	2185	1118	1067	402	312	90
Keonthal	39388	21015	18373	7711	4004	3707	585	412	173
Jubbal	24256	13487	10769	2575	873	1702	327	136	191
Other hill states	89155	47889	41267	11077	4586	6491	768	428	340

31. *Ibid.* Table VI.

remembered that this intrusion of non-Himalayan people was a phenomenon, which was less than a century old. The people who came into these Hill States brought elements of their cultural and social ideas into the lives of the peasants of the Western Himalayas adding to the effect of education and the new markets on local life.

Before continuing further with the discussion, it may be useful to first look at the occupational figures for a few selected castes of the Western Himalayas to highlight the nature of the shift from their traditional occupations, that was taking place. The three castes taken into consideration here are the Kanets, the Rathis, and the Dagi-Kolis. The Kanets, as has been discussed earlier, were the primary agricultural group of the region. They were of the Khash tribe and during the period when these figures were taken, were in the process of getting themselves recorded in government documents as Rajputs. The figures for Rajputs have not been discussed here since these are not available specifically for what were termed 'Hill Rajputs' in British records, and the use of Rajput for the entire Punjab would be of no use to the specific context being discussed here. The Rajputs were, in any case, mainly agricultural in this region of Punjab, and those Kanets who had managed to identify themselves as Rajputs, were somewhat better placed than their brethren in economic and social terms. The Rathis were an agricultural community adjacent to the Kanets in terms of social and economic parameters. The Dagis and Kolis were the primary providers of agricultural labour and other menial services but had no claims on the land which they worked (Table 5.5).

What is most interesting in the above figures is that the shift from agriculture, which is the traditional occupation of all the three selected demographic groups, has been the least among the Kanets, who are, among these three, the pre-eminent agriculturists. Among Kanets more than 91% depend on agriculture as the primary means of their livelihood, while for the Rathis the corresponding figure is 85% and for Dagis and Kolis it is only 80% of their total earning male population. But even among those who have agriculture as the primary means of their livelihood, almost 11% of Kanets, 14% of Rathis and slightly less than 20% of Dagi-Kolis have a subsidiary occupation. Further, these figures show that 7.56% of the total or 6291 Kanets male earners, 6.09% Rathis, and 18.86% Dagi-Kolis did not have any link with agriculture whatsoever. The high figure for the

Table 5.5: Occupation structure of three agricultural castes, 1931.³²

Occupation	Kanet	Rathi	Dagi-Koli
Total Earners, <i>Male</i>	83,189	31,178	47,660
Total Earners, <i>Female</i>	5,676	2,139	3,720
Working Dependents, <i>M</i>	27,600	12,953	17,594
Working Dependents, <i>F</i>	77,147	32,989	48,437
Non-Working Dependents	1,11,659	54,816	63,959
Number of Earners who Returned Agriculture as the Principal Means of Livelihood, <i>Male</i>	75,847	28,813	38,123
- do -, <i>Female</i>	4,345	1,840	2,192
Number of Earners who Returned Agriculture as the Secondary Means of Livelihood, <i>Male</i>	1,051	467	548
- do -, <i>Female</i>	70	34	98
Number of Working Dependents in Agriculture, <i>Male</i>	22,727	12,313	15,624
- do -, <i>Female</i>	67,670	31,724	39,686
Number Returning Agriculture as principal means of livelihood who have some Subsidiary Occupation, <i>Male</i>	8,222	4,089	7,369
- do -, <i>Female</i>	315	165	101
Income from Rent of Land, <i>Male</i>	122	25	29
- do -, <i>Female</i>	244	25	33
Labourers, <i>Male</i>	3,005	815	7,543
Labourers, <i>Female</i>	770	110	1,202
Employed in Officer or Gazetted Rank, <i>Male</i>	289	128	106
Employed in Other Rank, <i>Male</i>	489	3,302	222
Trade, <i>Male</i>	415	107	153
Trade, <i>Female</i>	45	6	11
Lawyers, Doctors, Teachers, <i>Male</i>	116	52	14
Lawyers, Doctors, Teachers, <i>Female</i>	11	0	0
Domestic Service, <i>Male</i>	768	247	415
Domestic Service, <i>Female</i>	57	53	36
Livestock, Milkmen, Herdsman, <i>Male</i>	1,841	512	831
Livestock, Milkmen, Herdsman, <i>Female</i>	109	38	145

32. *Ibid.* Table XI.

Dagi-Kolis should not be overemphasised since they traditionally had been involved in numerous non-agricultural menial occupations. The existence of such a group among the two dominant agricultural communities is indicative of the changes in the political economy consequent to the establishment of the British rule as well as the relative sloth in the rate of change.

While in itself such a low level of shift from agricultural occupations might indicate stunted growth of a modern economy, it is necessary to keep in mind the specific nature of the Western Himalayan political economy. Unlike in other parts of their Indian Empire, there was historically a very inadequate development of productive activities outside agriculture, pastoralism and gathering natural products. The little manufacturing that was carried out was almost all for self-consumption and was subsidiary to agriculture. Even after the establishment of the British rule there was no major industrial or economic intervention into the economy of the villages.

The shift from agriculture to other occupations, which is indicated in the above figures, was solely dependent on the markets of the Hill Stations and the administrative machinery introduced by the British. This assertion is confirmed when non-agricultural occupations are noted. Close to 9% of Kanets are in non-agricultural occupations connected with administration, services (including labour) and such activities as milkmen and traders. Of these only 405, or a minuscule 0.5% are Gazetted officers or are in higher professions. The percentages for the Rathis are similar. This clearly shows that while there was a definite trend towards involvement with the emergent markets and administrative legal systems, most of this was at the lower level. In the case of the labourers and domestic servants, who number 4600 or a little more than 5% of total earners, this might also support the contention based on land market statistics made in the last chapter, that stratification had intensified among the Kanet proprietary peasantry, which led to some of their numbers being ejected from land or greatly marginalised.

These transformations in education, in demographic patterns and in caste-occupation structures provide the background for the movements of social reform and for peasant rebellions in the twentieth century. There was an emergent strata among the Khash-Kanet peasantry, which was in the forefront of experiencing economic

integration of the Western Himalayas with the rest of the country, and which was therefore forced to come to terms with its social and political position as it defined the terms on which this economic integration was to be effected. It became increasingly necessary to shed those features of their social organisation, which weakened their position in the market that they all had become part of or were aspiring to become. Of the various features of their social structure, two came in for the earliest opposition from these Khash-Kanets.

The first had been the institution of Begar, which had never been popular because of the physical demands it made on the people involved and also because it interfered with the demands of agriculture and for maximum labour in the family economy, even during the pre-British period. This feature of Begar was further accentuated with the emergence of markets and the possibility of commercialisation of agriculture and labour, and by the twentieth century became the central concern of all peasant rebellions throughout the Western Himalayas. Allied to this concern of the peasantry was the difficulty they experienced in the actual transformation of the traditional revenue system to the new system ushered in with the Land Settlements of the British, which were based on cash assessments, cash collections, fixed demands, and disputes judicable only under a rule of law.

More often than not the Hill States implemented the new demands of the British Land Settlements but were loathe to surrender their older demands, especially where they pertained to specific products and to Begar labour. This created impossible situations for the peasantry and led to repeated refusals to accept either the new demands or honour the old ones. The earlier chapters have noted in some detail this phenomenon in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the second decade of the twentieth century, with the First World War coming to an end and the beginning of the first of the countrywide mass movements against colonialism, the nature of these peasant rebellions changed in the Western Himalayas too. It is not possible to assert that these were directly influenced by the national developments but this seems likely from two distinct sets of evidence.

First, the changing nature of demands and the increasing irrelevance of traditional systems of conflict mitigation in the region, and second, the manner in which the social reform movement,

specially relating to marriage customs, was organised and opinion mobilised. The following pages deal with marriage reforms in some detail and identify the particular features of the changes that have been referred to here.

Marriage Reforms

The cultural influences of mainstream Hinduism in the Western Himalayas became manifest in the attempts to reform marriage and the assertion of a specific caste identity by the Khash-Kanets, two related and allied, but distinct demographic groups, initiated social reforms in the Western Himalayas, at the beginning of the twentieth century. The first group comprised those hill men who had been educated in the new schools opened by the British and some of them had even attended colleges in Punjab. The other group consisted of orthodox Hindus based in towns like Simla, composed almost entirely of people who had immigrated into these mountains after the establishment of colonial rule. Both these groups had similar assumptions behind their efforts at social reform.

The central assumption of both was that the populations of the Western Himalayas were Hindus, as it had come to be defined during the emergence of this identity during the colonial period. This identity was taken to mean that social and religious practices had to be in conformity with the codes laid down in the accepted scriptures of the religion or its mainstream interpretations in the subcontinent. This led to a problem as far as the populations of the region under study were concerned. While they seemed to be Hindus on the basis of their religious practices and the fact that they were not Muslims or Christians, it was not possible to justify their heterodox marriage arrangements and their lack of caste practices according to any acceptable Hindu tradition. It was therefore stated that the populations of the Western Himalayas had become lax in their social and religious practices due to the demands of their difficult geography, which had long isolated them from the more civilised areas of Punjab and the Gangetic plains. Thus, the social reformers considered that they were merely correcting grievous deviations from the moral code of Hinduism which had occurred sometime in the past and not imposing a new or alien moral and social code on the local people.

This movement gained momentum during the middle of the third decade of the 20th century when the first phase of anti-colonial agitations had ended in other parts of the country and many activists of these struggles became interested in social and cultural agendas. There were two main organisations that represented the movements of social reform in the Western Himalayas at this time. The first was the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha* led by educated hillmen.³³ Their membership was composed of mostly those who traditionally followed orthodox Hindu social practices but many *Khash-Kanets* too were its members. The other organisation, closely allied with them, was the *Hindu Sabha*, which was led by Hindus from the plains who were resident in towns like Simla, and it was loosely aligned with the *Hindu Mahasabha* led by Pundit Madan Mohan Malaviya.³⁴ Together these two organisations petitioned the British Government, the rulers of the various Hill States. They organised public meetings to popularise their agenda of marriage reforms and the adoptions of proper religious and social practices by the populations of the region.

The uniqueness of the marriage form in the Western Himalayas had been noted by the earliest of European travellers. It became, over

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33. Thakur Surat Singh, the General Secretary of the organisation was a subject of Sirmaur and many of his relatives served in the Durbar. It is not clear whether he was a Khash or belonged to some ancient branch of the royal family, but his family was one of the principal landowners of the Rajgarh area of the State. Dr. Kedar Nath, Kahn Singh Sautha, Bar-at-Law (elder brother of Bhagmal Sautha), and Lala Puran Chand, B.A., L.L.B, were other important members of this organisation and like Surat Singh lived in Simla. Some rulers of Hill States like Baghat and Kuthar were also involved in their activities.
 34. *Report on Hindu Conference*, 28–29 June, 1924, Simla District. This Conference was organised by Hindu Sabha in association with Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha, the Singh Sabha, Sewasamiti, Akhara Committee, Sanatan Dharam School, among others. Its main agenda was Reet reform among the ‘Hindu’ population of the Western Himalayas. It also discussed and passed resolutions on starting a co-operative bank for the peasants and on their rights to meadows and grazing runs, promotion of Hindi and Nagri script, for temperance, in support of Hindu Mahasabha’s efforts at eradicating untouchability and its stand on *Shuddhi*, in support of the Gurudwara Reform Movement of the Sikhs, and for the establishment of a college in Simla.

the years of British rule, one of the commonly known ‘exotic’ features of the region’s social structure. Almost every travelogue, land settlement record, census and gazetteer contained descriptions of various forms of marriage that were known to the author and listed reasons and functions of this. It was usually seen as one of the important markers that highlighted the difference of Himalayan society from the rest of India, and put it much lower than the latter in the scale of civilisational evolution. It was therefore marriage and practices associated with it that became the first focus of the social reformers. But before discussing the precise nature of reforms proposed and the politics around it, a brief look at the main features of Himalayan marriage and its unenforced transformations, wrought by the introduction of new economic and social forces, may be appropriate.³⁵

Marriage was primarily a social contract between two individuals (or more appropriately for the present context, between a group of brothers and a woman) belonging to different clans and lineages. No religious sanction was necessary and like all social contracts, it was easily broken at the will of either of the two consenting parties. Marriage was solemnised through the exchange of bride price and certain markers of social sanction involving members of the clan and lineage of the bride and the groom. Different rituals were in vogue in different parts of the Western Himalayas for the solemnising of marriages, but the central feature was that social sanction was given to all couples who lived together, worked together and were not from lineages or social groups among whom marriage was prohibited. It was common for marriages to break up and on divorce the bride price had to be restored to the previous husband, who generally used it to get another wife.

Another central feature of the Himalayan marriage was the institution of group marriage, where brothers usually married together, one woman at a time. In this form of family, all the brothers and their wives were common and the children were owned collectively by all the brothers. Inheritance was to the next generation

35. The following description of the central features of Himalayan marriage have been discussed in chapter 2 but are here re-stated to place the marriage reforms in their proper perspective.

of brothers, who may be from different mothers, but whose fathers were common. There were certain rules governing partition of land and other property but it was rare for a family to split. Unlike in the trans-Himalayan regions, where Lamaic Buddhism had made polyandry into a religious form, there was no rule as to the number of wives or husbands in a 'normal' Himalayan family.

Women were precious as agricultural workers which meant that the larger the number of wives, the greater the unpaid agricultural labour that was available to the family, and thus greater the scope for expansion of productive activities and wealth gathering. But it was not easy to get wives and maintain them. For one, there was a negative sex ratio, as in most other parts of the Indian subcontinent, and then there was the necessity of giving bride price that could be quite high depending on the status of the girl's family and her ability to labour, among other factors. The number of wives that a set of brothers could afford was a marker of their status and prosperity. It was common to find within the same clan and village, families with polyandrous, monogamous and polygamous units, all depending on their ability to afford marriage(s) and the extent of their agricultural work requirements, both of which were, obviously, related.

By the turn of the 20th century, the introduction of money and markets coupled with the new-found confidence of land proprietorship was reducing the incidence of group marriages. An increasing number of families were finding it possible to afford and maintain one wife per brother and partition of inherited land and property was also a growing phenomenon. This was primarily because in the new circumstances a smaller plot of land could sustain a nuclear family when they involved themselves with some aspect of the growing market. Group marriages and other such forms were slowly pushed into those areas where the influence of the emerging towns and markets was minimal and where the means of communication were still a hindrance to the flow of modern goods and ideas. The available evidence seems to be clear about the receding popularity of group marriage all over the region, mainly due to the changed economic conditions.³⁶

36. While the petitions of the Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha keep mentioning Reet, it is almost always in the context of 'monogamous'

On the other hand, the introduction of money and markets into the Western Himalayas had an opposite effect on the other notable feature of Himalayan marriage, namely the institution of bride price and it being a social contract enabling easy dissolution. Features of *buying* women for their contribution to the agricultural labour and for their sexual charms seem to have become a prominent trend by the beginning of the 20th century. There were increasing complaints about the ability of rich peasants to seduce the wives of their poorer neighbours through offers of a higher bride price to their parents and the prospect of lesser physical labour for the woman in a family of many wives, which the family of a rich man (men) usually would be.³⁷ There were also complaints that men from the plains came and tempted hill women, married or unmarried, by giving exorbitant bride prices and that these women swelled the ranks of prostitutes in the cities of Punjab and the United Provinces.³⁸

Except for the families of the rulers of the Hill States and certain Brahmins, everyone took bride price, whether they were the Khash-Kanets or belonged to the servile populations. When a woman left her husband, her parents were expected to return this bride price to him. The next man to wed their daughter would pay them, and the sources are unanimous that it was extremely rare for a woman, who could work, to remain unmarried due to the importance of women in domestic and agricultural labour. This payment was known as *Reet* and marriages of divorced woman came to be known as *Reet* marriages.³⁹ Even the few social and proto-religious rituals of a normal Himalayan marriage were dispensed with in this marriage and once

relations. This could very well be due to a certain bashfulness on the part of these social reformers about reporting the existence of group marriages. But other sources like the gazetteers of Bushahr (1910), Keonthal(1910), Jubbal(1910), Sirmaur(1934) and Suket(1927) and H. W. Emerson, *Typescript of Unpublished Anthropological Study of Mandi and Bushahr*, MSS.EUR 0321, Oriental and India Office Collection, British Library, confirm this trend.

37. Letter from Surat Singh, General Secretary, Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha to The Superintendent of Simla Hill States and Deputy Commissioner, Simla District dated Simla, 12th June, 1924.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.* Also see H.W. Emerson, op.cit.

the money changed hands and the woman began living with her new husband, the marriage was deemed to have been solemnised. Before the coming of the British, when communication was difficult and mobility of people was limited, this flexibility of marriage ties did not pose any problems to the working of social institutions. This was primarily because of two reasons. (1) The 'circulation-of-women' remained within a specified number of local clans and lineages and (2) in a non-monetary economy the bride price remained stagnant for generations.

There was little scope for the expansion of a family's economic potential, and thus the number of wives wed remained similar from generation to generation of brothers in a family. There was also the lack of cash wealth to get more wives even if one fancied it since it was often the case, that instead of bride price one of the brothers laboured for the family of the woman for a specified period of time.⁴⁰ Dissolution of marriage was possible and often resorted to but was not dependent on merely the higher *Reet* offered. There were few opportunities for men from outside the community coming and taking women by paying the bride price, though it is obvious that the opportunity to make money was not lost whenever a hill man found an outsider willing to give cash for his daughter.⁴¹ A traffic in women from the region for the *zenanas* and brothels of the plains also existed, but was of a much lower scale than what emerged during the last years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. With the opening up of the region to people from distant lands and to the working of the markets, there was a sustained inflationary pressure on bride price⁴² and it tended to encourage a commodification of women, in the proper sense of the word. Men would use this institution of *Reet* to *buy* women for sex, labour or both. A social institution that had regulated the family and property

40. See discussion in chapter 2: section 'Heritage of the Pandavas'.

41. Letter from Shanti Devi, wife of Thakur Surat Singh, to Mrs. Abraham, wife of E.G.F. Abraham, Superintendent Simla Hill States dated Simla, 6th November 1924, quotes from the Gazetteer of Jubbal State which recounts the incident of Lord Combermere being offered a "very pretty girl...at the moderate price of 150 rupees; more than which sum" adds the writer, "I have seen given for a Scotch terrier in Calcutta".

42. See footnote 135, Chapter 2.

inheritance of the people came under increasing strain due to this intrusion of market relations into its working. Other problems arose, like the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially syphilis.⁴³ A growing number of cases were reported where the parents of the wife encouraged her to elope with another man, who offered a higher bride price since they stood to gain from it, and sometimes a woman in her early twenties had already had seven to eight different husbands.

The regular trade of hill women to the plains under the guise of *Reet* marriage, the unscrupulous habit of some people who made a business out of the divorce and remarriage of their daughters, the spread of venereal diseases and the abhorrence with which Hindu society viewed the concept of bride price and divorce, not to mention polyandry, were the main reasons cited by the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha* and the *Hindu Sabha* for their campaign to abolish *Reet* marriage.

On 12th June, 1924 Thakur Surat Singh, the General Secretary of the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha* sent a five page long letter to the Superintendent of Simla Hill States setting out the case for the abolition of the custom of *Reet*, and asking the British Government to show the same enthusiasm for this social reform as they had previously shown for the abolition of practices like Sati, Thugee, female infanticide and slavery.⁴⁴ The method suggested for this was to involve the various rulers of the Hill States and the officers of the British Government in formulating and implementing laws which would ban this custom and make it a criminal offence at par with social practices mentioned above. The definition of *Reet* was taken from the Gazetteers of Simla and Kangra districts and embellished with the Sabha's own evidence. It stated that

Reet is a form of marriage, without any ceremony, contracted by paying her [the wife] price, varying according to beauty generally from Rs 100 to Rs 500 and has recently been as high as Rs. 2,000, with a woman already legally married. There is no limit to such marriages, and, as is evident from their nature, can be as easily dissolved as they are freely undertaken.⁴⁵

43. Letter from Surat Singh dated 12th June 1924, op.cit.

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

The letter went on to show that this custom had made the entire population susceptible to lust, much to the detriment of virtue and a stable family life. It stated that strenuous efforts were often made by some persons to sow discord between the husband and wife, so that they may ‘tempt’ the latter away. The ability of the richer members of a village community to ‘buy’ the wives of their poorer counterparts, and their own loss of wives to even richer rivals from the plains was stressed repeatedly as leading to strife and bad relations in society, apart from the fact that these women ended up filling the ranks of prostitutes in the plains. The faults of this custom were seen to be exaggerated due to the almost total illiteracy and poverty of the inhabitants of the region. It claimed that sexually transmitted diseases were spreading fast and this affected many as early as in their teenage. Women were increasingly becoming barren. During the 1914–1918 war most of the recruits from the Simla Hills were rejected as unfit for military service on account of their suffering from venereal diseases.⁴⁶

This was not the first attempt at reforming or rather controlling the growing commercialisation of the custom of *Reet*. In 1885, the Hill State of Sirmaur was the first to impose a tax, of five percent of the *Reet* amount, so as to increase cost and thus discourage such marriages.⁴⁷ In 1886 this was raised to 7%, and by 1890 it was 10%.⁴⁸ This did not reduce the incidence of *Reet* marriages since those who were indulging in them were a new category of people who were not to be discouraged by such minor cost escalations. Rather this tax became a form of extra revenue for the State, so much so that in 1910 it was again raised to 15%. By 1920 this tax generated revenues of Rs. 36,000 for Sirmaur State and this continued, with minor fluctuations, till 1926 when the tax netted Rs 34,263.⁴⁹ After that date one finds a sharp fall in the collections of *Reet*, but that was due to the efforts of

46. *Ibid.*

47. Y.S. Parmar, *Polyandry in the Himalayas*, Delhi, 1975, pp. 174–175. Under the Act XVII of 1887 of Sirmaur State, the Lambardars were made responsible for maintaining registers of all marriages and reporting them to the Tehsil. They received a remuneration of Re. 1 for each marriage reported and 8 annas for every *Reet* reported; *Gazetteer of the Sirmur State, 1934*, re-printed and published Delhi, 1996, pg.97.

48. Y.S. Parmar, op.cit.

49. *Ibid.*

organisations like the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha* which ran extensive propaganda campaigns and mobilised both public and official opinion all over India. There is some evidence to show that whatever may have been the original intention in imposing the *Reet* tax in 1885, by the end of 20th century's first decade it had become one of the important money makers for the different Hill States.

1910 was the year when the first organised attempts were made to oppose the custom of *Reet* and mobilise public and official opinion for its abolition. As a result of this, many of the Hill States under the charge of the Superintendent at Simla imposed fines on *Reet* marriage, which were fixed as a percentage of the total amount and also restricted certain categories of marriage. This was done under a general policy of controlling *Reet* and the emerging trend of hill women being bought by plains men under the guise of this custom.⁵⁰ But these measures had no effect in controlling this trend or in reducing the incidence of *Reet* among the people of the Western Himalayas.

The *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha* repeatedly levelled the charge that the Hill States had developed a vested interest in the continuation of this practice, even though it took the help of some of the Hill States in its campaign against it.⁵⁰ There is an undertone of accusation, in their letters and memoranda, against the rulers for not doing enough for curtailing *Reet* because these rulers considered the Khash-Kanets as inferior Hindus who did not practice any of the codes of mainstream Hinduism. Whether or not this perception about the complicity of the Hill States in the continuation of *Reet* was true cannot be asserted with any certainty, but this sense of difference and

50. *Ibid.*

51. See letter of Thakur Surat Singh dated 12th June, 1924, op.cit. for an example of a strong charge against the unwillingness of the Hill States to abolish *Reet* due to the income they derived from it. But in the Hindu Conference held in Simla later that month, in which the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha* was a prominent participant, a concerted effort was made to involve these very Hill States in the campaign against *Reet*. So much so, that the help of these Hill States and petitioning the British authorities seems to have become the primary tactics to emerge from the deliberations of this Conference. See *Report on Hindu Conference*, op.cit.

superiority is evident in many of the letters and documents of the Hill States regarding this matter.⁵²

The letter of 12th June, 1924 marked the beginning of a new and successful phase of the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha*'s campaign against *Reet*. This time, along with their regular exhortation to the British Superintendent to end this practice by legislating against it in the British districts and ordering the Hill States to follow suit, it proposed a set of reformed marriage practices which could be considered for legislation.⁵³ They also proposed the holding of a conference consisting of British officials, rulers of the Hill States, representatives of organisations like the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha* and the *Hindu Sabha* and some representative men of the region. This conference was needed to form a consensus on the issue and enable an agreement about the manner best suited to end *Reet*. The core proposal of the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha* was that no woman should be permitted by law to marry any man during the life of her husband.

This was also the spirit of a law that the *Rana* of Baghat had enacted in 1917, whereby marrying a woman whose husband was alive was made a criminal offence punishable under Sections 497, 498, 366, 368, 494 and 496 of the Indian Penal Code.⁵⁴ But as the letter goes on to add, this law proved difficult to impose mainly because it was

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52. Letter from *Raja*, Jubbal State to Superintendent, Simla Hill States dated 26th June, 1925; letter from *Thakur*, Theog State to Superintendent, Simla Hill States dated 24th June, 1925; letter from the Manager, Keonthal State to Superintendent, Simla Hill States dated 6th August, 1925; letter from *Rana*, Koti State to Superintendent, Simla Hill States dated 20th March, 1928.
 53. The letter of 12th June merely suggested the nature of legislation and executive intervention to end the practices it spoke against. It was, however, the manager of Baghal State who provided the detailed legislative draft that was finally enacted after modifications based on discussions between the British officials, the Hill States and the Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha. For the contribution of the Manager, Baghal State to the entire debate see the two 'notes' submitted to the Superintendent, Simla Hill States dated 19th and 21st July 1924 and the letter dated 6th March 1925.
 54. Letter from *Rana*, Baghat State to Superintendent, Simla Hill States dated Solon, 15th August 1924.

promulgated in a small Hill State, while its neighbours, with whose populations the people of Baghat had marital relations, did not have any such law. The Superintendent sent this letter to all the Simla Hill States for comment and to elicit their views about the conference proposed by the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha*.

While the different Hill States were sending their replies, other organisations too were involved into the campaign; the most important of which was the *Hindu Sabha*. Apart from this, two other means were adopted to educate and mobilise public and official opinion about *Reet*. The resolutions and letters written by the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha* were sent to important national newspapers all over the country, and many of them published news reports and editorials about it.⁵⁵

But the most interesting of all these methods was sending letters to the wives of important British officials in Punjab and Indian Governments about the evils of *Reet*, and asking their help in convincing their husbands to put an end to a custom which was degrading their sisters in the Western Himalayas.⁵⁶ Not only was their help solicited in influencing their husbands, it was also suggested through this letter that a circular letter from these women could be sent to the *Maharanis* and *Ranis* of the Hill States requesting their help in the matter. This was perhaps the first organised attempt by the social reformers to mobilise the different sections of Himalayan women on an issue that directly concerned them. That this involvement was conceived in strictly patriarchal terms and was directed towards a regressive re-ordering of the family relations of peasant women, does not take away from the significance of this attempt to unite wives of British officials, women of the Hill *Durbars* and the wives of the social reformers on a public issue. It, unfortunately, remains a lonely example of women's participation in the efforts to reform the Himalayan family.

It is not possible to assess the effect of this letter on official thinking but it did get noticed in their correspondence, and must have added

55. The Statesman, Calcutta, 24th May, 1925; The Hindustan Times, Delhi, 28th May, 1925; The Servant of India, Poona, 4th June, 1925; The Tribune, Lahore, 9th June, 1925; The Bombay Chronicle, Bombay, 10th June, 1925; The Times of India, Bombay, 2nd July, 1925.

56. Letter from Shanti Devi, op.cit.

somewhat to the pressure that was sought to be built up for action on this subject. What one does find is that from 1924 there was intense activity among the British administration and the Hill States complementing the activism of the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha*. Over the next one year there was a set of rules made into law which effectively changed the status of marriage in the entire Punjab Himalayas, and was instrumental in helping the social reformers in eradicating the institution of bride price and easy dissolution of marriage by the time India became independent.⁵⁷ At some places polyandry, or group marriage survived, but these marriages too were often conducted on the basis of orthodox Hindu rituals. The polyandrous relation became increasingly conventional and informal, not legitimised in the very rituals of marriage, as was the case earlier.⁵⁸ The path towards legislating on *Reet* and marriage forms was long and complicated, with opinions being voiced by the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha*, the British and the rulers of the Hill States. It may not be possible to go over the entire process in this description, but rather the main points are noted.

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57. *Rules for the Abolition of the Custom of 'Reet' in the Simla Hill States, etc.* (Framed by the sub-committee of the Durbars of the Simla Hill States), September 1926. By the fifth decade of the twentieth century, around the time when British rule finally ended, 'polyandry' and its associated betrothal practices (bride price, *Reet*, easy dissolution, secular nature) were already confined to a few pockets of the Western Himalayas – Shilai in Sirmaur and adjoining Tehsils of Jaunsar and Bawar, Dodra-Kawar pargana of Bushahr, Malana village of Kullu district, apart from the trans-Himalayan tracts.
58. Along with the abolition of *Reet*, group marriages – polyandry for most – too ended as a social practice. It is interesting to note some of the strategies which were institutionalised for this purpose in the rituals of the newly established orthodox 'Hindu' marriage, which are still unique to the region. Immediately prior to the marriage, one of the grooms brothers is designated the 'Dharam Bhai' of the bride, and conversely one of her sisters is designated the 'Dharam Behen' of the groom. This effectively puts an incest taboo on the relations of the 'Jija-Sali' and of the 'Bhabi-Dewar', thus ending almost all possibilities of 'co-habitation'. I am grateful to Sahba Chauhan for this and numerous other anecdotal facts which have helped me understand both the working of the family and the clan.

The point that was repeated most frequently was that this custom was totally opposed to the tenets of all the scriptures of Hinduism.⁵⁹ Since the population of the region was obviously classified as Hindu, it was easily argued that *Reet* and such other customs surrounding marriage were the result of long years of isolation from civilisation. This point was important in underlining to a hesitant and cautious British officialdom, that these reforms were not contrary to the religion and beliefs of the population that it affected. The *Hindu Sabha* and the *Hindu Mahasabha* were prominent in arguing this point. The Rajput status of the Khash-Kanets – the main practitioners of *Reet*, apart from the lower status *Kolis*, Doms and Chamars – was stressed in the resolutions and memoranda of these two organisations. The fact that these populations had slid from following the practices of this caste was taken as added proof of their historical deviation from the tenets of mainstream Hinduism due to isolation. For these organisations, the return of the Rajput status to them was linked to their reforming such practices as went against Hindu law and morality, and *Reet* was the most prominent of these. While the politics relating to the demand and granting of Rajput status by the Khash-Kanet is a different story by itself, it is necessary to note here that this was intrinsically combined with the reforms of marriage customs, specially *Reet* and polyandry. The other points that were used most often in arguing for an abolition of *Reet* were (1), the spread of sexually transmitted diseases through this custom, (2), the degradation of morals of the people, specially women who gave no importance to chastity or virginity, and (3), the ‘slave’ traffic of Himalayan women to men from the plains.

There were two sets of disagreements that were raised against the proposals of the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha* and all those who wanted the British Government to intervene legislatively to abolish *Reet* and associated practices.

One, was the opposition of some of the Hill States’ rulers who felt that while this practice is barbarous and abhorrent to Hindu morality, it has been the only form of marriage in the region among the *Khash-Kanets*, and is closely linked to their family economy and patterns of

59. Letter of Thakur Surat Singh dated 12th June 1924, op.cit.; *Report on Hindu Conference*, op.cit.

inheritance. To meddle with this custom, on the basis of arguments based on Hindu scriptures was wrong and would lead to widespread dissatisfaction among the subjects. The real problems were the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and the traffic in women by men from the plains, for which appropriate laws should be made, not to restrict bride price and divorce per se.⁶⁰ This opinion, which was voiced by those who claimed to be pure and high ranking Rajput Rajas and Ranas, also highlighted the point that historically the Khash-Kanets were never recognised as Rajputs and so the rules of this caste should not be applied for them. This was in line with their opposition to the parallel demand of the Khash-Kanets for granting them Rajput status and for an end to Begar demands on them.

The other opposition to the proposals for the reform of marriage laws came from one section of British officialdom, which based its objection on the point that the new laws proposed were socially more regressive than what existed, specially for the women.⁶¹ While this opinion too accepted the need to stop the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and sale of women among the population of the Western Himalayas, it also argued that the proposed new laws were copies of orthodox Hindu laws, which made the woman a prisoner of child marriages and put life long liabilities on individuals who happened to be women. The possibility of divorce in this marriage, which basically was a social contract between two juridically equal individuals, was seen as the greatest asset because it vested the women with influence inside the family. These reforms were seen as attempts by men, indoctrinated with the hierarchical notions of Hinduism, to diminish the element of individual freedom and dignity that was integral to the nobility of the Himalayan peasant. It linked up with a range of other conceptions about the nature of the Hindu character, the essential difference of the mountain people from those of the plains and the nobility of the barbarian.

These two distinct positions of disagreement to the proposed marriage reforms overlapped in their rejection of any moral lapse by

60. Letter from Rana, Koti State, op.cit.

61. Letter No. 133 from Superintendent, Simla Hill States to All States in Simla Hills, dated 12th January, 1925. This Superintendent of the Simla Hill States was E.G.F. Abraham, to whose wife was addressed the letter from Shanti Devi.

the Himalayan peasant in following this marriage practice. The Rajas and Ranas did consider it inferior in the scale of civilisation to the orthodox Hindu rules but they felt that it was integral to Himalayan society for centuries without count, and no great harm had come to these people as a result of this. The British officials who championed this custom, on the other hand, felt that it was superior to the marriage customs of mainstream Hinduism where the wife virtually becomes a life long slave of her husband.

The objections raised by some of the Hill States and some British officers resulted in a modification of the original proposal. The *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha* accepted that this reform was not based on popular demand, rather it would be an imposition on a population that was mostly disinterested in this matter.⁶² It was also accepted by them that the best means for effecting any such reform was through religious persuasion, but it was also pointed out that very few reforms in British India had come about that way. Sati was abolished in the face of stiff opposition from the conservatives in Hindu society, similar was the case with women's education, widow remarriage, etc. The high level of illiteracy and superstition would make religious and social persuasion a long drawn out affair while the ill effects of this custom needed to be addressed immediately. The objections about orthodox Hindu laws being alien to the social and historical context of the Western Himalayas were not answered directly, but it was repeatedly pointed out that the population of the region was Hindu and no legal tradition allowed Hindus to have marriages similar to *Reet*. It was shown to be akin to the *Asura* and *Paisacha* forms of marriage listed in the code of *Manu*, but these were specifically discouraged in these very texts. Arguments about the moral degradation represented by *Reet* marriages was accepted by a majority of the Hill States' rulers and British officials since it went against their notions of family and marriage in Europe, and the opposition to these reforms remained a minority.

After about a year of debates a certain degree of agreement emerged about what constituted the main problem, and what steps would be most effectual without disturbing other related social

62. Letter from *Thakur* Surat Singh, General Secretary, Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha to The Chief Secretary to the Government of Punjab dated 18th December, 1925.

practices of the people. The main problem was identified as two-fold. One was the use of this custom of *Reet* by men from the plains to buy women as slaves or prostitutes. The second, and related closely to this but including arguments about promiscuity among women, was the spread of venereal diseases among the population and the growing infertility of women. The function of *Reet* as an escape from lifelong bondage of child marriage or other marriage, with little love or compatibility among the spouses, was accepted as important but not crucial enough to defend it from abolition. The legislation that followed represented this understanding.

Reet marriages were made illegal and it became a criminal offence to contract *Reet* marriages.⁶³ Those who were involved in this, the father, the brothers and the husbands, both previous and present, were henceforth to stand trial for any such marriages. In case it was proved that the woman involved was also part of the conspiracy to elope with another man after her lawful marriage, she too would be included in the list of offenders. At the moment of the Act becoming law, specific rules were formulated to register and classify all existing marriages. Those that were *Reet* marriages, but had been accepted under customary law and the law of the concerned Hill State would be held, legal as but no further *Reet* marriages would be allowed. Other family types, not covered by the new law would also be accepted but all of them had to be registered by the local authorities, mostly the 'Panchayats' newly formed by the British. Those man-woman alliances which were not acceptable even under customary law, as codified in the different Hill States, would be held as illegal and had to be dissolved.⁶⁴ These included, for the most part, those *Reet* marriages where litigation had continued after the woman had shifted residence to the house of her new husband, over the amount of *Reet* or bride price payable, and sometimes the custody of male children conceived during the 'divorce proceedings'. The ruling of the Panchayats or other notified bodies of local administration over the legality of existing marriages was taken to be final even though there was the possibility of appeal. All existing marriages had to be registered with them and new marriages could be registered only if they met the criteria laid down in the new law.

63. *Rules for the Abolition of the Custom of 'Reet' in the Simla Hill States*, op.cit.

64. *Ibid.*

The most important feature of traditional marriage that was clamped down upon was the system of bride price. It was what made this system conducive to traffic in women and was also seen as selling one's daughter even in cases of bona fide marriage, since it ran contrary to the true Hindu custom of *Kanyadaan*. No one could give money to get a wife, whether virgin or divorced and no man could accept money for giving his daughter or sister in marriage. It had often been argued by the opponents of the proposed reforms that in a context where child marriages are very common, and where the concerned boy and girl do not have much say in the first marriage, the possibility of ending this union was a necessary check to it becoming a lifelong burden on people, specially women, for whom the reforms were ostensibly meant. On the other side of the debate, it was shown that it was precisely this possibility of divorce that enabled those who wanted to purchase a slave or prostitute to seduce women even from families that were otherwise contended. For the reformers, *Reet* and divorce were at the core of the problem. Thus, the possibility of divorce became the focus around which much of the debate revolved.

Permitting divorce under the new law but making it possible only under special circumstances transcended this difference of opinion on the question of divorce. These special circumstances were seven in number – (1) impotence or lack of ability to consummate marriage, (2) incurable insanity, (3) leprosy, (4) polygamy of husband, (5) loose character of the woman, (6) unnatural habits of the husband, (7) conviction of the husband for criminal assault on his wife.⁶⁵ In a situation, where either of the spouses becomes solely dependent on the other for the protection of his or her life, it was made the responsibility of the other to provide protection and maintenance irrespective of whether a divorce was effected. It was also made illegal to marry children below 16 years for males and 12 years for females, and the age difference between the two could not be more than 10 years. These rules, along with the acceptance of widow marriage, were seen as a compromise that met the fears of the social reformers about the abuse of divorce. The practice among high class Rajputs of giving *Khawas*, or slave girls, as part of their daughter's dowry was also banned. Infringement of these rules was liable to be punished with

65. *Ibid.*

six months rigorous or simple imprisonment or a fine of Rs 100, or both. All money paid as *Reet* was henceforth to be confiscated by the Hill State concerned and used specifically for works of public utility.

People in large areas of the Western Himalayas quickly accepted the changes heralded by this set of rules. This was so because of certain processes that were undermining the economic and social foundation on which Himalayan group marriage had historically rested. The functioning of the traditional family structure had corresponded with the structure of the family economy, where different and productively distinct resources had to be tapped for the sustainability of the family. The near impossibility of expanding the family's resource base due to geographical reasons was another factor which harmonised with the fraternal group marriage, where inheritance was difficult to divide between brothers. The cultural isolation of the region and its social structure based on clans made it possible for family forms to survive which were radically different from what was the norm in the plains.

All these factors changed as has been discussed in different chapters till now. The extra resources that money earned from the British towns managed to give a different vision to economic activity – it was now possible to conceptualise economic growth and increase in prosperity through an increased involvement in the emerging markets. Thus, possibilities outside the polygynandrous family economy, and specially the viability of nuclear families if they were sufficiently integrated into the market, emerged for the first time. It was still a small and socially marginal trend. But often a single case proves itself to be of much greater historical import than its statistical status in society would indicate, and this is precisely what seems to have been the case in the Western Himalayas. Partition of farms and with it the partition of the polyandrous joint family were increasingly coming up before officials for all the legal complications that they entailed. Money entered into the village and family economies in areas close to the British towns, and was fast spreading its influence to areas further. These possibilities of economic growth were historically unprecedented and based on a successful integration into the market. The two commodities that the peasants in the Western Himalayas had for integration with the market were agricultural produce and labour. In tandem with the rise in their economic opportunities, as distinct from actual economic power, was their attempt to curtail those aspects

of their traditional life patterns that hindered this process and which made them feel contemptible and inferior to the other players in this market.

It was precisely here that marriage reforms were not only concerned with the questions of health and the traffic in hill-women, but also very much with questions of morality. By the twentieth century a section of the Khash-Kanets had been exposed to education in schools set up by the British Government and Christian Missionaries or the Hill States on the patterns of the British Schools. Many had also attended colleges in Punjab and the United Provinces and these were the people who gave voice to demands like the abolition of Reet, for the abolition of Begar and for their caste status to be recorded as Rajput and not *Kanet* in government documents like the Census, Gazetteers and Land Settlements. They were from families which had been the earliest in cashing in on the opportunities offered by the emerging markets which enabled them to see the further opportunities offered by this new economic and political system, but which was being hindered by certain of their traditional practices. Their education and exposure to the ideas current among the middle classes of twentieth century India gave them the confidence to organise themselves into bodies and agitate for their demands with the British, as well as carry out propaganda against age old practices among their own people. In this endeavour they were helped both by the organised voice of Indian nationalism and by mainstream Hindu opinion.

It has been mentioned that the *Himalaya Vidiya Parbandhani Sabha* was helped by the *Hindu Sabha*, an affiliate of the all India organisation, the Hindu Mahasabha. At the conference organised to voice public opposition to the continuation of *Reet*, prominent members of the Simla chapter of the Hindu Mahasabha participated along with Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Swami Vishwesharanand, Sir Ganga Ram and Samuel Evans Stokes, the American Baptist missionary, who had recently converted to Hinduism via the Arya Samaj and was a well known follower of Gandhi, in both the political and social fields.⁶⁶

The traditional family structure was coming loose with the growing possibilities of nuclear families sustaining themselves and with the

66. *Report on Hindu Conference*, op.cit.

constant battering that they got from the mainstream Hindu morality, that was increasingly making its presence felt in the towns and even in the administration of the hill states through the medium of managers, administrators, etc. But the changed economic conditions also impacted the structure of labour appropriation by the hill states. Labour was needed in the towns for various purposes and the demand increased with every passing year. With the opening of the Hindustan–Tibet road to vehicular traffic, greater numbers of people could come to the Hill Stations from the plains, and thus it helped increase the demand for labour and services. Apart from the ability of labour to earn money as never before, it also became crucial in the attempts to increase agricultural production by the peasant families. A larger part of the land could now be diverted to grow cash crops and even food grains of higher quality than what was the case earlier.

On the other hand, the Hill States too had now become caught in the networks of the new economy. While their dependence on the appropriation of their subjects' productions was lessened with the opening up of new resources like forests to commercial operations, they needed greater protection from peasants refusing demands for Begar. This was because now it was no longer a customary demand of the Hill States levied on a subject peasantry, but this demand for Begar labour had to compete, so to speak, with the allurement of the money that the same labour would command in the towns. And another word for large-scale refusal to accept the demands of the State is rebellion. The previous chapter has already cited the examples of some large-scale refusals of this sort, with labour and the economic demands of the Hill States already the focus. By the time the Second World War ended, the peasantry had already developed an organised politics in the form of the Praja Mandals. These Praja Mandals, affiliated to the All India States' Peoples' Conference, unified the economic demands of the peasantry with the political objectives of the national movement and gave leadership to the struggles which led to the formation of the State of Himachal Pradesh.

The next chapter deals with this phase, when distinct groups within the Praja Mandals began to articulate different political programmes, reflecting the emerging stratification within the erstwhile clans of the Khash-Kanet peasantry and discusses how this impacted on the emergence of the new State of Himachal Pradesh.

CHAPTER SIX

After Independence

On 20th May, 1946 the Cabinet Mission published its recommendations which made it apparent that British rule was soon to end in the Indian subcontinent, even though the exact manner of its end was still intensely disputed. The consequences of these Cabinet Mission proposals were as momentous in the Western Himalayas as in other parts of this vast British colony. As a result of these proposals political activity revived in the Punjab Hill States. Praja Mandals were formed where none existed and older ones were reactivated. More importantly, conflicts within the leadership of these Praja Mandals became apparent and came to the fore in many organisations. This development was directly related to the clash between two different political agendas for guiding the Praja Mandal movement, which were themselves based on divergent class and ideological locations of the contending groups. The immediacy of independence and the possibility of gaining political power in real terms, lent a certain bitterness and rancour to these struggles within the Praja Mandals and their umbrella organisation, the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council.

Right from the beginning of the encounter with British colonialism, the peasantry of the Western Himalayas had attempted to come to terms with it. During the first few decades the impact of British presence was relatively marginal and therefore, did not greatly strain the traditional economic and political institutions of the people. It was the growth of Simla as a major market and political centre that

accentuated the contradictions that were inherent in the rule of Britain – one of the most industrially developed countries of the world – over people who had yet to stabilise a sedentary agricultural society producing constant social surplus. The growing conscriptions of Begar to transport the baggage and persons of increasing numbers of Europeans visiting Simla led to large-scale disruptions in the agricultural and pastoral cycles of the peasantry. Since then almost all the major instances when the peasantry revolted can be seen as collective attempts by them to come to terms with the changes introduced by British rule. The *Dumh* provided the basic format for most expressions of peasant discontent and dismay at the changes that they witnessed in their world. These changes were experienced in

- the peasant community's political relations with the Hill States,
- the demands made on their resources and labour,
- the obstructions caused by the structures of traditional economic and social institutions in their access to the emerging markets,
- the human geography of the region, where new resources emerged and disputes arose over control of existing ones,
- the dissolution of the traditional family structure and household economy,
- the spread of literacy, modern education, communication and cultural values informed by ascendant nationalism.

Whenever and wherever the pressures of change became too much for the peasantry to handle, they revolted using the traditional method of the *Dumh*. From being protests primarily against the supposed corruption and tyranny of the Hill States' officials these *Dumhs* slowly evolved into vehicles for the expression of a wide gamut of demands relating to the livelihood of the peasantry. The *Dumh* retained its relevance for the peasantry over the hundred and thirty two years of colonial rule and it heralded their arrival in independent India. What changed was the manner in which this form was adapted by the politically conscious elements of the peasantry, through the Praja Mandals, to align the Himalayan peasantry with the agenda of the freedom struggle in the 1930s and later. The adaptation of central elements of the *Dumh* by the Praja Mandal and its use for avowedly political purposes to ally the local demands with a country wide

movement was preceded by more than a century of lonely struggles by the peasantry, against an increasingly hostile British response to any collective action by the peasantry in the Hill States of the Western Himalayas.

By 1946 many of the ideas and values, which sustained the peasantry's adherence to the Hill States' monarchy had started to come apart as a result of the growing politicisation and radicalisation of their *Dumhs*. The region did not remain insulated from the ideas and values that were bringing more and more people into the ambit of the freedom struggle in different parts of the British Indian Empire.

It was in this context that the Cabinet Mission proposals reached the Western Himalayas holding out the promise of early independence and removal of British protection to the Hill States. The immediacy of these possibilities proved eminently suitable to mobilise larger masses of people into movements against the colonial system of tiny hill states. It was also this same promise of early independence, combined with the promise by the Indian National Congress of democratic governance based on universal suffrage, that fuelled the struggle to control the Praja Mandals among its members who represented the politically active section of the peasantry. It was clear that some form of power sharing with elected representatives would be imposed on the rulers of the native states by the successor Indian National Congress government in Delhi.¹ Therefore, it became imperative to be in a position to win the elections that were coming. The best way for that to happen was to control the Praja Mandals, which were the only political organisations commanding the respect of the peasantry, and legitimacy with the leadership of the All India States' Peoples' Conference. It was this certainty of democratic reforms along with the political stature of the Praja Mandals that led many Hill States to start 'official' Praja Mandals of their own, so that the eventual power sharing could be negotiated with those who were obedient to the ruler.

1. Apart from the pronouncements and declarations of the Indian National Congress leadership, this is apparent in the correspondence that the All India States' Peoples' Conference leadership had with the Praja Mandal activists of the Western Himalayas. See File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML.

The struggles of the preceding years in Hill States like Dhami, Koti, Kunihar, Bilaspur, Mandi, Jubbal, Sirmaur, etc. were primarily responsible for the respect that the Praja Mandals received from the peasantry. While these struggles mobilised the peasantry and brought about a convergence of their economic and political demands, the resultant persecution led to the destruction of Praja Mandal organisations within many Hill States. Some activists escaped to Simla and carried on their activities from there, others were put in prison or de-politicised through fines, harassment and good-conduct bonds that they were made to sign. In the period after the *Pajhauta* rebellion of *Sirmaur* State, the only noticeable activity of the Praja Mandals was carried out in the towns of Simla and Dehra Dun and a bit among the hill states' subjects resident in Delhi.² Much of this activity was confined to the passing of resolutions, publicising issues and events in the press, and making representations to the Political Agent to the Punjab hill states or other British and hill state authorities. None of this involved mass contact or mobilisation, specially within the hill states. Politics of resolutions and representations is best done in closed rooms preferably in the presence of important leaders and other persons of high stature. Those Praja Mandal activists who had led the struggles in the hill states were relatively new in the organisation, and thus not in positions of leadership or central to these activities.

The leadership of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council was controlled by those, who had come into prominence in public life as a result of being the most politically conscious section of the first generation of Himalayan peasantry to receive higher education and urban employment.³ They had formed and mobilised opinion on issues of social reform within the peasant communities, most notably

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2. Correspondence between Praja Mandal activists and the AISPC leadership till about the end of 1946 was confined to these towns. See File No. 165, AISPC Papers, NMML, pp. 31–71; File No. 161, pp. 398–362; File No. 29, pp. 245–260; File No. 63, pp. 591–471.
 3. Y. S. Parmar, who became the undisputed leader of Himachal Pradesh was a doctorate in Anthropology from Lucknow University where he had worked under the supervision of Prof. D.N. Majumdar and Padamdev Gautam was a registered Vaid and affiliated to the Arya Samaj in Simla. Purnanand, the most important Praja Mandalist of Mandi was a lawyer and had been educated in Lahore.

on the question of marriage reforms, and were prominent citizens of the towns of the Western Himalayas due to their being the first few hillmen to enter the modern professions of law, medicine and education. As has been discussed in a previous chapter, they belonged to that emergent class within the Khash-Kanet proprietary peasantry which had been able to increase the area under commercial crops and integrate with the market most effectively. Apart from this emergent class of rich peasants, individuals from those families which had traditionally been involved in the administration of the hill states, also formed part of this small group of pioneer *Paharis* who received higher education and employment in the professions of law, medicine, education and civil service. The Praja Mandals, therefore, reflected the concerns and interests of this new class of urban-based intellectuals. The agenda of this emergent class, composed partly of non-peasant landed elements and partly of rich peasantry, related closely to increasing their access to political power, intervention in policy decisions and removing those social and cultural markers which relegated them to a lower status in the national mainstream. Therefore, the social reforms, which were so central to the politics of this class, emphasised both the purification of existing practices and the rejection of their Khash-Kanet identity in favour of caste status as Rajput and Brahmin.

This emergent class of rich peasants, already moving fast into ever deeper integration with the colonial economy and the markets of the local towns, desired a similar integration at the social and cultural levels. While the colonial state was not in contradiction to this endeavour of this emergent class, it nonetheless was alien to them and they did not have established channels of communication with it. On the other hand, the sizeable sections of Indians from the plains, both in the trades and professions, were not alien, since there were regular channels of communication and social interaction, but contestants and adversaries in relation to the colonial state. This situation was made more acute due to the limited scope for expansion of the local urban markets and the skewed nature of the colonial economy with which they were dealing. The stakes in this battle increased with the imminence of independence. In this situation, given the political infancy and economic weakness of this rich peasant class it lacked confidence and sought allies in important sections of the Hill States'

administrations and with trading groups in the towns. An agenda that combined the positions of these different social groups reflected in the working of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council. This agenda foregrounded access to political power by the subjects of the Hill States, over other economic demands concerning land revenue.

This leadership of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council and the Praja Mandals in various Hill States had never led peasant movements. Their claim to leadership of the peasant communities was primarily based on their position and status derived from their education and employment. By the time the Cabinet Mission published its proposals, a vibrant leadership within individual Hill States was already available, which had gained experience and confidence during the struggles of the peasantry under the banner of the Praja Mandals. Most of these struggles had developed with little or no direct encouragement from the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council or the All India States' Peoples' Conference. Growing peasant dissatisfaction and unrest had found a ready ally in the All India States' Peoples' Conference, but only after its 1939 Conference at Ludhiana. This alliance helped the leadership of these *Dumhs* to develop politically and also protected them to a certain extent.

By the fourth decade of the twentieth century, large masses of the Khash-Kanet peasantry had experienced the working of the urban markets first hand. They had developed an interest in commercial agriculture and were keen to benefit from the economic expansion, which they felt was potentially available to them in the new economy and which they saw their richer Khash-Kanet kinsmen benefit from. Large numbers of them had transformed their agricultural practices to grow vegetables and premium food crops for the urban markets. Many families sent their junior members to work as peons, rickshaw pullers, coolies, gardeners, etc. in these towns to earn cash, which was usually converted into capital to increase their family's involvement with the urban markets. But this involvement with the market and the new economy remained marginal, at best, and they remained the most vulnerable section within it. Moreover, many resources of the region, which traditionally had been under their control were forcefully taken over by the Hill States, and had been transformed into commodities in the colonial markets to the immense profit of the *Rajas*, *Ranas* and *Thakurs*. This loss of control over local resources had not

been uncontested, and therefore remained as a strong claim within peasant memory. Forests and forest produce would be the most obvious and historically important example of this.

This class of middle peasants within the Khash-Kanet felt hampered in their attempts to profit either from commercial agriculture or the working of the larger colonial economy, due to the political and revenue system of the Punjab Hill States. These Hill States fossilised and retained versions of traditional imposts and taxes on the peasantry even under cash based land settlements. Begar and taxes like *kafan* tax, *athwara* tax, *marriage* tax,⁴ etc. would be some examples of the demands on the peasantry's labour and resources which rankled most. Further, it had become next to impossible for the peasantry to remove these obstacles to economic advancement, since any public demand for ending these was increasingly met with hostility by the Hill States and their British masters. It was in this context that demands like those for abolition of Begar and reduction in the cesses were regularly made and became central issues in every peasant rebellion of the region.

Apart from the continuation of traditional forms of revenue collection in association with new claims on natural resources by the Hill States, further pressure was put on the fragile economy of the Himalayan peasant family through the increasingly corrupt nature of the Hill States' administration. Traditionally the *Dumh* had proved to be a strong resource of the peasantry against arbitrariness by the Hill States. They did not allow corruption and oppression beyond certain acceptable limits. All public check on maladministration and corruption was removed under the patronage of the British, who were loathe to interfere in the 'internal' working of these Hill States and increasingly took a hostile stance to public expressions of protest.

This section of the Khash-Kanet peasantry had been recorded as 'owners' (*Adna-Malik*) of the land they tilled and had managed to get

4. *kafan* tax was levied on State subjects on the death in the royal family to cover funeral costs; *athwara* tax was meant to cover birth in the royal family. It is not clear in the document what 'marriage' tax refers to, since a percent of the bride price was taxed as also a tax was levied on the occasion of the marriage of one of the Raja's daughters. AISPC Papers, File No. 29, Pamphlet issued by Sewak Mandal (Hindi), undated but released after the Praja Sammelan of 11–13 November, 1946.

a toehold in the growing markets of the Hill Stations. They felt pressured with the demands of Begar and other taxes and regularly protested against this demand on their labour and dignity. But while they opposed the Begar conscription of the Hill States and British governments, they were crucially dependent on the traditional labour requisitions of the Dagi-Kolis and on pools of labour within the Khash-Kanet village community. For different reasons both the Dagi-Koli labourers, and the rich peasants among the Khash-Kanet communities were increasingly loathe to uphold these traditional institutions for requisitioning labour⁵. The bulk of the Khash-Kanet peasantry was consequently trying to reduce or end the demands on them by the Hill States while at the same time fighting to preserve its entitlements vis-à-vis other sections of the rural population. This difference of economic positions and social situations provided the framework for the divisions within the Praja Mandals.

The initial opposition to forced monetisation of the region's economy through the land settlements was. The natural response of the middle peasantry. Later they opposed the continuation of institutions of surplus appropriation from the pre-monetisation period, when they realised the potential for economic expansion in the new economy. It was the participation of this section of the Khash-Kanet peasantry which formed the backbone of every single peasant rebellion in the Western Himalayas during colonial times. Sectional interests within the *Durbar* often hitched along with them and provided leadership and legitimacy. But with the stabilisation of

5. These traditions of community labour were proving a hindrance to the labour that successful peasants could invest into their own land and also to their aspirations to a higher social status. An illuminating example is found in the deterioration in the systems of irrigation in the Tons basin due to the reluctance of the more prosperous peasants in providing labour to maintain the *Kulhs*, mentioned by D.N. Majumdar, *Himalayan Polyandry*, Bombay, 1962, pp. 186-7; Mohan Singh Rathore, *Nineteenth Century Cis-Sutlej Hill States*, H.P. University, Simla, 1987, (unpublished Ph.D. thesis), pp. 115-116. The reluctance of the Dagi-Kolis is more difficult to record, but is discussed in Jai Deep Negi, *Begar and Beth System in Himachal Pradesh*, Delhi, 1995; and this is indicated in the memoranda submitted to the States Ministry and to the AISPC by the Himalayas Scheduled Caste Association, Delhi, between November 1947 and January 1948, AISPC Papers, File No. 63.

colonial rule, this ruling class leadership of the *Dumhs* became increasingly rare.⁶ Exposed to the new world of the British towns, education and nationalist ideas, leadership emerged from within the Khash-Kanet peasantry to fill this vacuum. The ruling classes within the Hill States now looked to the British for redress of their grievances and stayed as far from ‘unconstitutional’ means of influencing policy as possible. The British officials and policies too were turning increasing hostile to expressions of peasant dissatisfaction. The earlier sympathy for these ‘noble barbarians’, clearly evident in Bushahr in 1858–9 and Suket in 1878, was displaced by army action in Mandi in 1909 and in Bilaspur in 1930, by firings and by general rapine and pillage in Dhami and Pajhauta in 1939 and 1942, respectively. The new leadership of the peasantry emerged at this time when both these older allies of the peasantry had turned hostile. It was in this context that the peasantry of the Western Himalayas found an ally in the All India States’ Peoples’ Conference and the freedom struggle.

This new leadership of the peasantry was as eager to share political power that was imminent, as the older leadership of the Praja Mandals. They were better placed to rally the peasant masses on this political agenda due to their uninterrupted record of leading struggles on economic issues, which had enabled them to keep a live contact with the peasants, unlike the earlier generation of peasant leaders, who lived in towns and had not taken direct part in any major peasant struggle. This they managed to do in two Hill States, Bushahr and Tehri Garhwal but failed to do in Sirmaur. The following pages survey in brief the happenings in these three Hill States, the reasons for the success in two and failure in one and the consequences.

Bushahr was one of the most socially diverse, territorially large and politically complicated of hill states. During the period of the Second World War, its internal politics had remained quiet. One peasant organisation, blessed by the *Raja*, existed in the State. The *Bushahr Sewak Mandal*’s work was a combination of social reform propaganda among the peasantry and representations to the authorities on various

6. While the rebels in Bushahr (1858) and Suket (1877–78) received support from sections of the ruling family, Mandi (1909), Bilaspur (1930) and Dhami (1939) received no such support. The fourth chapter has detailed descriptions of these.

issues like grazing rights, Begar and land revenue⁷. In September of 1946, the *Bushahr Sewak Mandal* circulated pamphlets in the villages of the State informing all about the 'Praja Sammelan' that they were planning to organise during the Lavi trade fair in November at Rampur that year.⁸ The Lavi has traditionally been one of the most important trade fairs of the Sutlej valley and has always attracted villagers and tradesmen from distant regions of the Western Himalayas. During the twentieth century it also started to be frequented much more by the local peasants of Bushahr. The proposed Conference of the *Bushahr Sewak Mandal* was aimed at discussing the problems of the State's peasantry, draft a resolution listing them and present them to the Raja.⁹ The pamphlet also announced the intention of the *Sewak Mandal* to change its name to Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal and seek affiliation to the All India States' Peoples' Conference. This pamphlet makes it quite clear that the primary reason for the sudden urge to highlight the political issues of the Bushahr subjects was the Cabinet Mission's plan, which had made Britain's intention to give full political independence to India amply clear. In such a situation, where no one could foretell the future, especially of the native states, it became necessary for the subjects of such States to organise themselves politically so that they too would have a say in their destiny. This was the self-proclaimed reason for the organisation of the Praja Sammelan by the Bushahr Sewak Mandal and its change to the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal.

During this 'Praja Sammelan', or founding conference of the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, resolutions calling for the establishment of elected representative government was demanded in Bushahr along with the reduction in land revenue, expenditure on schools and

7. Letter from S.R. Balnatah, President, Bushahr Sewak Mandal, Delhi, to General Secretary, AISPC, dated 20.10.1946; Pamphlet issued by Sewak Mandal (Hindi), undated but released after the Praja Sammelan of 11–13 November, 1946; both from File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Pamphlet issued by Sewak Mandal (Hindi), undated but released after the Praja Sammelan of 11–13 November, 1946; Letter (in Urdu) from Girjadhar Prasad Negi, General Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, to AISPC, Delhi, dated 22.11.1946; both from File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.

hospitals and abolition of Begar.¹⁰ The fact that these demands had been presented at an assembly of over 1300 peasants¹¹ and accepted by them, as also the impending changes in the political organisation of the country at large, which would facilitate the acceptance of the same, spread to the villages through word of mouth and the 'propaganda tours' organised by the leaders of the Praja Mandal.¹²

The birth of the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal was itself controversial, notwithstanding the supposed blessings of the Raja and the large peasant gathering at their Praja Sammelan. A couple of weeks before the announced 'Praja Sammelan' was to herald the formation of the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, a group of Praja Mandal activists in Simla formed their own organisation called the Bushahr Praja Mandal.¹³ The leader of this group was Padam Dev Gautam who had been resident of Simla for the past few years and was involved with the Himalayan Riyasati Praja Mandal as its office bearer.¹⁴ The Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal was not recognised as the official Praja Mandal of the State, even though it had organised its conference attended by about a 1300 people and sent the affiliation fee along with the resolution of the conference seeking affiliation to the All India States' Peoples' Conference.

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- 10. Resolutions 1 through 10, dated 11.11.1946, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 - 11. Letter from Girjadhar Prasad Negi, General Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Rampur to AISPC office, Delhi, dated 16.11.1946, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 - 12. Letter from Satyadev Bushahri, President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Rampur, to General Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Delhi, dated 15.01.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 - 13. Letter from S.R. Balnatah, President Bushahr Sewak Mandal, Delhi to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi, dated 20.10.1946; Letter (in Urdu) from Girjadhar Prasad Negi, General Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, to AISPC, Delhi, dated 22.11.1946; Resolutions passed by the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Delhi dated 30.11.1946, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML. For the views of the Padamdev Gautam group, see letter from Jagat Ram, General Secretary, Bushahr Praja Mandal, Simla, to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi, dated 26.2.47, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 - 14. *Ibid.*

From this time onwards, there had existed two bodies calling themselves the Praja Mandal in the State of Bushahr. Initially, the group led by Padam Dev Gautam, due to its presence in Simla and its contacts with the All India States' Peoples' Conference leadership in Delhi was recognised as the 'true' Praja Mandal.¹⁵ Whatever may have been the immediate consequences of the Sarahan 'episode'¹⁶ for the pargana's peasants, it made it amply clear to the central leaders of the All India States' Peoples' Conference that the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal was not an organisation which could be ignored.

The All India States' Peoples' Conference sent letters recommending the merger of the two rival Praja Mandals to the respective office bearers, but this proved ineffective¹⁷. The Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal led by Satya Dev Bushahri claimed that Padam Dev Gautam was a man without any credibility within the Bushahr peasantry, and that his organisation was composed of those Bushahr subjects who lived in Simla and worked in government offices or carried on their own business.¹⁸ Further, they claimed that Padam Dev Gautam had started the 'parallel' Praja Mandal of Bushahr only to retain his control over the Himalayan Hill States Regional Council, which he would have lost with the emergence of the 'real' peoples organisation.¹⁹ Padam Dev Gautam countered this by claiming that the Praja Mandal that he led was formed more than four years ago. And it was only with the announcements of the Cabinet Mission, which made it clear that India would soon achieve independence, that

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15. This is evident in the nature of correspondence between the AISPC leadership in Delhi and the two factions of the Praja Mandal in Bushahr all through the winter of 1946–47.
 16. This refers to the minor rebellion in the Pargana of Sarahan in December 1946 which was led by the newly formed Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal. It is discussed in here.
 17. Rather than reduce the distance between the two factions, the efforts of the AISPC leadership to bring about a rapprochement led to a heightening of charges and counter-charges between them.
 18. Resolutions passed by the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Delhi dated 30.11.1946, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 19. *Ibid.* The charge is also repeated many times in almost all correspondence between the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal and the AISPC on the subject of affiliation.

the Bushahr Durbar had conspired to foist this ‘illegitimate’ Praja Mandal led by Satyadev Bushahri on the people of the State.²⁰

Finally, the All India States’ Peoples’ Conference decided to send its representative to work out a compromise between these two organisations and merge them and appoint a new executive and panel of office bearers. A meeting was held in Simla, presided over by Masurkar, Office Secretary of the All India States’ Peoples’ Conference, on the 1st of March, 1947.²¹ On Masurkar’s initiative, the two rival organisations were merged into one organisation called the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal with Padam Dev Gautam as its President, Satya Dev Bushahri as the Vice President, and two of Padam Dev Gautam’s associates as the General Secretary and Treasurer.²² This merger unravelled even before it had time to work. Rather than very evening the General Secretary of the erstwhile Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, which was the original name of Satya Dev Bushahri’s organisation, sent a formal letter to Masurkar rejecting the merger as going against the interests of their organisation and by implication, against the people of Bushahr.²³ He claimed that while their organisation had larger membership and a better record of struggle against the State autocracy, the panel of office bearers in the new organisation under-represented them. He openly accused Masurkar of bias against them and of playing a partial role, which had increased the differences between the rival organisations, rather than reducing them.

For the next few months, both the Praja Mandals of Padam Dev Gautam and Satya Dev Bushahri called themselves the Bushahr Rajya

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- 20. Letter from Jagat Ram, General Secretary, Bushahr Praja Mandal, Simla, to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi, dated 26.2.47, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 - 21. Office note by Masurkar to the Jai Narayan Vyas, General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi, dated 14.03.1947, along with Appendix B: ‘Note on dispute in Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal’, authored by Masurkar, dated 13.03.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 - 22. Minutes of Meeting of Bushahr Representatives, Simla, dated 01.03.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 - 23. Letter from Girjadhar Prasad Negi, General Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Rampur, to Masurkar, AISPC, Simla, undated but received on 02.03.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML. Also letter from Anulal Dhairak, President, Rampur Sabha, Delhi, to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi, dated 10.03.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.

Praja Mandal.²⁴ The All India States' Peoples' Conference, at least Dwarkanath Kachroo, Jai Narayan Vyas and Masurkar, the three people who communicated with the activists of the two Bushahr Praja Mandals, refused to accept the legitimacy of the Satya Dev Bushahri led organisation after the merger effected at the meeting, attended by members of both parties²⁵. But again they were forced to grant them recognition, *de facto* at first,²⁶ and officially later,²⁷ due to the continuous activities of Satya Dev Bushahri Praja Mandal in Bushahr.

There was a growing assertion of the Bushahr peasantry in general and the Praja Mandal activists in particular against what they termed illegal taxes, the foremost among them being Begar levies. In December 1946, the peasants of Sarahan pargana had refused to comply with orders for providing Begar to State officials.²⁸ The Bushahr police arrested the prominent Praja Mandal activists of the area and tortured them into signing bonds of good conduct. This

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24. The only difference was that the letterhead of the Padamdev Gautam group spelt it as Bashahr Rajya Praja Mandal, whereas the Satyadev Bushahri group spelt it as Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal. Even this was not possible in the Devnagri script and thus this created many problems (and comical situations) both at the grassroots and with the AISPC leadership.
 25. Letter from Masurkar, Office Secretary, AISPC, Delhi, to Padamdev Gautam, General Secretary, Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council, Simla, dated 15.03.1947; letter from Masurkar, Office Secretary, AISPC, Delhi, to Padamdev Gautam, General Secretary, Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council, Simla, dated 21.03.1947; letter from Girjadhar Prasad Negi, General Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Rampur, to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi, dated 26.03.1947; letter from Dwarkanath Kachroo, General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi, to Satyadev Bushahri, Vice-President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Simla, dated 27.03.1947; all references from File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML. Note the designation of Satyadev Bushahri in the last mentioned letter.
 26. Anonymous office note, AISPC, Delhi, dated 04.06.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 27. Letter from Secretary, Reception Committee, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Rampur, to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi, dated 26.10.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 28. Letter from Satyadev Bushahri, President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Rampur, to General Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Delhi, dated 15.01.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.

torture and ‘humiliation’ of the Praja Mandal activists ‘excited’ the population of the entire pargana and over 1000 peasants gathered at the main village of the pargana in a show of anger seeking redress from the Raja.²⁹ They wanted the punishment of the officers who were responsible for torturing those arrested.

The Raja, on receiving news of this, dispatched the *Tehsildar* of the area with a police thanadar and other policemen to disperse this crowd and arrest the leaders. The crowd of peasants, which was mostly unarmed, when they heard of the dispatch of this force, panicked. Rather than facing the State’s force, they dispersed and hid in the woods surrounding their villages and other secluded areas, leaving their fields and homes unattended. The police force, led by the *Tehsildar* started attaching the properties of the main Praja Mandal activists and auctioning off the same.³⁰ This further infuriated the peasants, who could see the disposal of their property from their hideouts in the forests and mountaintops. It also became apparent that the small police force could be overpowered by the assembled mass of unarmed peasants. In this situation, it became increasingly difficult for the Praja Mandal activists, led by Satya Dev Bushahri who was among them, to control the outbreak of violence. It was only the intervention of some central All India States’ Peoples’ Conference leaders with the *Raja* and the feelers for compromise that were sent by Satya Dev Bushahri to the *Raja*, that finally ended the police campaign.³¹ It seems quite clear that the leadership of the Praja Mandal did not want the agitation to become violent due to their stated deference to Gandhi’s injunctions. But this seems to be spurious reasoning when one considers that in about a years time this very leadership led a large scale peasant agitation in this very State, where no such restraint was kept on the peasantry.

The records are not clear about whether the property, which was attached and auctioned, was returned to the original owners or what other course was adopted.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*

31. Letter from Dwarkanath Kachroo, General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi, to Chief Minister, Rampur Bushahr, dated 10.01.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.

In the second week of March 1947, after the failed attempt at bringing the two factions together, the Praja Mandal led by Satya Dev Bushahri gave notice to the Bushahr *Durbar* demanding announcement of elections for representative government within the week or face a Satyagraha.³² Two days after the Satyagraha began, the *Raja* announced that an interim popular government composed of ministers nominated by the Praja Mandal would take charge on the 19th of April and prepare for elections, which would lead to the establishment of 'responsible' government in Bushahr.³³ At this public announcement of the *Raja*, the Satyagraha was called off and preparations began for the formation of the 'Praja Mandal' ministry. But to complicate matters, the *Raja* passed away on the 16th of April and thus it is not possible to state whether the announcement was genuine or merely a tactics for buying time. The latter may actually have been the intention since these decisions were generally taken with the advice and consent of the Political Agent at Simla, who refused to nominate any Praja Mandal member to the Interim Council for Administration, which was formed by him to run affairs of State during the minority of the heir.

This Interim Council of Administration was composed only of official members, led by the Chief Minister of the State who was an outsider.³⁴ The next few months witnessed the stagnation of the movement for representative government in Bushahr, mainly due to the continuation of bickering between the two Praja Mandals and their attempts at one-upmanship in the context of rapidly changing political equations after the death of the *Raja*. Both Praja Mandals accused each other of being mere showpieces of the Bushahr authorities and of attempting to sabotage the popular movement of the people.³⁵ It was

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- 32. Letter from Satyadev Bushahri, President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Rampur to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi, dated 22.03.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 - 33. *Ibid.*
 - 34. 'Message to the People of Bushahr from the Bushahr Durbar', issued by the Political Agent, Punjab Hill States, dated Rampur, 18.04.1947. Also see copy of resolution passed by public meeting of residents of Rohru Tehsil, Bushahr State, dated Rohru, 11, Baisakh, 2004 (24.04.1947), File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 - 35. Letter from Satyadev Bushahri, President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to AISPC, Delhi, dated Rampur, 03.06.1947; letter from Saran Das, Office

in this situation that elections were finally held by the Interim Council of Administration, under pressure from the States Ministry and the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal.³⁶ In these elections, the nominees of the Satya Dev Bushahri faction won all the elective seats in the Chini and Rampur Tehsils, but the election was disputed in the Rorhu Tehsil where the Padam Dev Gautam faction had put up its own candidates.³⁷ This dispute gave a handle to the Interim Council of Administration to postpone convening the elected constituent assembly for more than six months.³⁸

In the meanwhile, elections were held on 10th June, 1947 for the executive and other leading posts of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council of the AISPC.³⁹ The electoral college for this was composed of delegates who were themselves elected, and at places nominated, by the Praja Mandals of the constitutive Hill States. The number of delegates given to each Hill States was in accordance with its population. Thus, Tehri Garhwal had 24 delegates, Mandi 11,

Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated Rampur, 09.07.1947; letter from S.R. Balnatah, President Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Delhi branch to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated Delhi, 11.07.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML. What is most striking about the correspondence during June, July and August of 1947 is the almost complete lack of reference to coming independence, the elections in Bushahr and the machinations of the rival group remain the only concern.

36. Letter from General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi to Chairman, Interim Council of Administration, Bushahr State dated Delhi, 12.07.1947; letter from Girjadhar Prasad Negi, General Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated Rampur, 25.06.1947; letter from Satyadev Bushahri, President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to Resident, Punjab Hill States dated Simla, 20.05.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
37. Letter from Satyadev Bushahri, President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated Simla, 17.10.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
38. Letter from Vice-President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated Rampur, 27.12.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
39. Anonymous office note, AISPC, Delhi dated 04.06.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.

Sirmaur 8, Chamba 7, Bushahr and Bilaspur 6 each and all the other Hill States together accounted for the remaining 20 out of the total of 82 delegates.⁴⁰ But the highest memberships were in Tehri Garhwal and Bushahr with 11,500 and 3,130 members on their rolls, respectively. Other populous Hill States like Sirmaur and Bilaspur only had 1,000 and 700 members, respectively.⁴¹ It seems that this qualitative difference in the membership numbers reflected the difference in the character of the respective Praja Mandals and strengthened those who represented larger numbers in the internal struggles of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council.

By the time of this election to the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council, two distinct political groups had emerged inside it, which struggled for supremacy within and popular acceptance outside. In most Hill States the Praja Mandal had come to be dominated by persons affiliated to either of the two groups. In Bushahr where two Praja Mandals existed side by side, the one led by Padamdev Gautam was slowly edged out by the one led by Satyadev Bushahri, who managed to win public support and wider legitimacy for his organisation through a series of agitational activities and Satyagrahas, two of which have been noted above. The group representing the older leadership of the Praja Mandals included Yashwant Singh Parmar and Padamdev Gautam, apart from others like Suratram Prakash, N.D. Ratra, ShivaNand, S.R. Verma, Santram Shastri and Daulatram Shankhyan.⁴² They were all educated, in government jobs or other urban professions and belonged to rich landed families. They had the support of the Praja Mandals in the States of Sirmaur, Mandi, Suket and Bilaspur.⁴³ Sirmaur had experienced an extremely militant peasant

40. 'Report on the Formation of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council of the All India States' Peoples' Conference', dated 14.04.1947, Appendix 'A', File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *Ibid.* Specially see the list of office bearers nominated to the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council at the meeting convened on 01.04.1947 at Simla by Masurkar for this purpose, immediately after the meeting with Bushahr representatives where the Satyadev Bushahri faction was effectively sidelined in the organisation.

43. File No.161, (Sirmaur State), AISPC Papers, NMML; letter from L.D. Verma, General Secretary, Himalayan States Sub-Regional Council, to the

rebellion in the pargana of Pajhauta in 1942, where the more radical elements of the State's Praja Mandal had participated and were subsequently jailed or exiled. Therefore, the extant Praja Mandal was composed of Yashwant Singh Parmar supporters who remained in control till the end.⁴⁴ In Bilaspur and Mandi the Praja Mandals had supporters of both groups but the Padamdev Gautam – Yashwant Singh Parmar group pre-dominated due to their old links with the leadership of the local Praja Mandals, who were well entrenched and did not provide space for the new leadership to emerge.⁴⁵

The Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal and the Tehri Praja Mandal were the principal opposition to the dominance of the Padamdev Gautam – Yashwant Singh Parmar group. Satyadev Bushahri of Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Bhagmal Sautha of Jubbal who had been in the forefront of the Dhami and Koti peasant rebellions of 1939, and Paripurnanand of the Tehri Praja Mandal led this group.⁴⁶ Most of the local activists supporting this group in the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council were primarily peasants, who continued living and working in their villages and were often not even educated. Later, sections of the Dagi-Koli population too joined this group, some through The Himalayas Scheduled Caste Association.⁴⁷

President, AISPC, Delhi dated Simla, 18.06.1947, File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML. This Sub-Regional Council was formed after the elections for the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council were held on 10th June where Padamdev Gautam lost the post of General Secretary to Satyadev Bushahri. In this new Council Parmar remained the President, as in the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council, but Padamdev Gautam was rehabilitated as Chief Organiser. All important Hill States were represented in this Sub-Regional Council but for Tehri Garhwal.

44. Parmar retained a live contact and control over the Sirmaur Praja Mandal while its President was Shivanand Ramaul, a member of the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council Working Committee.
45. Letter signed jointly by Paripurnanand of Tehri Praja Mandal, S.R. Balnatah of Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal and Bhagmal Sautha of Jubbal, addressed to Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramaiyah, President, AISPC, Delhi dated 22.07.1947, File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Satyadev Bushahri had organised a two day Dalit Sammelan under the aegis of the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal in Rampur town in December 1946, see letter from Satyadev Bushahri, President, Bushahr Rajya Praja

From the available records it seems that Tehri Garhwal was the only place in the Hill States where the Praja Mandal functioned even before 1946. Tehri authorities imprisoned the foremost leader of the Tehri Praja Mandal, Sridev Suman, in 1944. He was charged with fermenting dissatisfaction among the State subjects and hampering the war effort. In prison, Sridev Suman claimed the treatment of a political prisoner, but the State authorities insisted on classifying him as a criminal, on which issue he went on a hunger strike in May 1945. His demands were still not met and his hunger strike continued. After 75 days, his condition became precarious and he was shifted to the hospital where he died after three days.⁴⁸

This incident became a rallying point for the activists of the Praja Mandals, not only in the Himalayan regions but all over the country. 25th July, the day Suman died, was commemorated by all the Praja Mandals affiliated to the All India States' Peoples' Conference and public meetings were organised to highlight the lack of civil liberties in Princely India. In the Himalayan States it became an occasion for the re-launching of the activities of various Praja Mandals and the beginning of Praja Mandals in States, which had remained without any political organisation till then.

Tehri Garhwal was politically under the administration of the United Provinces and as such not a part of the Punjab Hill States. But the All India States' Peoples' Conference grouped all the Native States of the Himalayan region under Himalayan hill states' Regional Council.⁴⁹ This was done according to their policy of bunching Native

Mandal to General Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal (Delhi Branch) dated Rampur, 15.01.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML. Letter from Balak Ram, General Secretary, Himalayas Scheduled Caste Association, Delhi to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated 15.11.1947, (copy sent to Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Incharge States' Ministry and Home Affairs.) File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML. The Himalayas Scheduled Caste Association seems to have been close to the politics of the Satyadev Bushahri group, but throughout maintained their autonomous position in all correspondence.

48. Statement on affairs of Tehri Garhwal State, File No. 165, AISPC Papers, NMML, pp. 100–103.
49. Resolutions relating to the Ludhiana Conference of the All India States' Peoples' Conference, File No. 191, AISPC Papers, NMML.

States, which shared similar culture, history and regional features into the same Regional Council. While a large part of the mountainous area of Punjab was under the hill states, Tehri Garhwal was the only Hill State in the United Provinces. It had historical and cultural traditions that were similar to the adjoining areas of the Punjab Hill States specially Bushahr, Jubbal and Sirmaur. It also shared similarities in economic and social practices. The administrative division between the Punjab Hill States and Tehri Garhwal were criss-crossed by ties of marriage, religion, trade and pastoralism, which facilitated the political unity of the area as envisioned by the All India States' Peoples' Conference.

This bunching together of Tehri Garhwal with the Punjab Hill States by the All India States' Peoples' Conference remained non-controversial till the months immediately preceding independence. There was hardly any agitation launched across the entire region under the direction of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council and they did not have any plan of involving their constitutive Praja Mandals in common action. The Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council got involved in the individual activities of the different Praja Mandals under it, sending advice, sanctions for Satyagrahas, representing to the British authorities in Simla and mediating communication between the Praja Mandals in the Hill States and the All India States' Peoples' Conference. Its contribution at the beginning or during the course of major peasant rebellions like at Dhami, Koti or Pajhauta was negligible. In fact in the Dhami and Pajhauta rebellions it was the Simla City Congress Committee which came forward with support, both political and material.⁵⁰ This disinterest of the Himalayan hill states' Regional Council towards these peasant struggles may have been a consequence of the difference between the class position of its leaders with that of the peasant rebels and their different political agendas. While these peasant rebellions wanted to end the entire revenue and political system of the Hill States, the

50. There is a large amount of material regarding the lukewarm reception to the Dhami rebellion by the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council and the active support from the Simla Congress. See *The Tribune*, dated 18th, 19th, 20th and 31st July, 1939. Also see letter from Purn Anand, President, Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated 01.01.1947, File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML.

Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council kept pressing only for the establishment of representative government. Often the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council was in opposition to the agitational plans of the local Praja Mandals.⁵¹ In fact, each Praja Mandal carried out its own activity without reference to either the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council or other Praja Mandals of the region. Usually, they communicated directly with the All India States' Peoples' Conference without taking the intermediate body of the Regional Council into account.⁵²

In this situation, the affairs of Tehri Garhwal did not bother the office bearers of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council and the activists of the Tehri Praja Mandal communicated with the All India States' Peoples' Conference from Dehra Dun and Pauri directly. Often the leaders of the Tehri Praja Mandal did not attend the meetings of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council held at Simla since it was difficult to access from Dehra Dun.⁵³ Similar was the case with the Praja Mandal of Chamba State, which was almost always represented

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51. This is evident in the discouragement to any proposal for mass agitation by the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council. See letter from General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi to K.N. Gairola dated 27.08.1946, File No. 165; letter from Satyadev Bushahri, President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated Rampur, 22.03.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML. See also footnote number 53 above.
 52. Almost all the correspondence in the AISPC Papers regarding the Praja Mandals of the different Hill States is between the central leadership of the All India States' Peoples' Conference and the leadership of the local Praja Mandal. Much of the correspondence between the individual Praja Mandal and the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council comprised of letters to their comrades belonging to their faction or Praja Mandal and related to factional politics. The organisational and political content is found almost exclusively in the direct correspondence with the All India States' Peoples' Conference.
 53. This later became the justification for the creation of the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council and the exclusion of Tehri Garhwal from Himachal Pradesh. See, among many others, letter from Y.S. Parmar, President, Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council to G.N. Shastry, Tehri Praja Mandal dated Simla, 16.05.1947; unsigned copy of letter from President, Tehri Praja Mandal, Delhi branch to Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramaiah dated Delhi, 11.06.1947, File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML.

in the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council by two Chamba State subjects, who lived and worked in Simla.⁵⁴ While the Chamba Praja Mandal found itself physically closer to the Congress leaders in Lahore, its links with the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council remained formal. Similarly for the activists of Tehri Praja Mandal, the travel time and cost to Simla from Dehra Dun was similar to the cost and time of travel to Delhi and Lucknow. Therefore, they too found it more convenient to deal directly with the All India States' Peoples' Conference and Congress leadership in these cities and only formally retained their ties with the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council.

These ties of indifference and disregard came under immense strain in the years 1947 and 1948. Throughout 1946, the Tehri Praja Mandal launched a series of mass actions of the peasantry to force the Raja to reduce by half the revenue rates, abolish labour conscription and appoint popularly elected ministers in his administration.⁵⁵ These agitations came to a climax during August 1946 when the entire leadership of the Tehri Praja Mandal was jailed by the State and all expressions of public dissatisfaction with the ongoing revenue settlement were met with fierce repression.⁵⁶ The jailed leaders went on a hunger strike in jail, demanding their release and their treatment as political prisoners till then.⁵⁷ This hunger strike went on for more than two weeks but did not result in any change in the policy or attitude of the Tehri *Durbar* with regard either to its revenue settlement operations or political activity in its territories. This intransigent attitude of the State's administration led to the local Praja Mandal activists and the peasantry in general becoming increasingly

54. 'Report on the Formation of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council of the AISPC', dated 14.03.1947, File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML.

55. Three main sources have been used to reconstruct the history of the agitations of the Tehri Praja Mandal, all from File No.165, AISPC Papers, NMML; (i) letter from Jai Narayan Vyas, General Secretary, AISPC to Jawaharlal Nehru dated Narendranagar, 13.08.1946, (ii) Press Release of the AISPC, Delhi regarding Tehri affairs (along with its enclosures) dated Delhi, 26.08.1946, (iii) 'Note on My Visit to Tehri State' by Jai Narayan Vyas, undated.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

restless and impatient, and open to persuasion by the Communist Party.⁵⁸

The Communist Party had a relatively small but seemingly active unit in the town of Dehra Dun and had close working relations with the Tehri Praja Mandal, whose executive had at least two Communist Party members.⁵⁹ This was the period when the All India States' Peoples' Conference was busy preparing for the transfer of power and negotiating with the Princes both at the central level and at the Regional Councils to introduce power-sharing with them. The growing radicalisation of the peasant movement in Tehri Garhwal and the increasing influence of the Communists in it, led to the intervention of the central leadership of the All India States' Peoples' Conference. They worked out a compromise with the Tehri Garhwal *Durbar* whereby representative government was promised, and an offer was made to rehabilitate those political prisoners of the Praja Mandal whose property was attached and auctioned by the State. It is interesting to note that this compromise did not cover the few Communist Party members who were jailed with the Praja Mandal activists.⁶⁰ The necessity of political unity of the All India States' Peoples' Conference and the Princes to combat the growing influence of the Communists was stressed in many places and made explicit in one letter sent by Jai Narayan Vyas, General Secretary of the All India States' Peoples' Conference to the Prime Minister of Tehri Garhwal.⁶¹

In the struggles that were launched in Tehri Garhwal, the local Praja Mandal activists found themselves in close affinity with the Praja Mandal activists of neighbouring Hill States of Punjab like Bushahr,

58. *Ibid*, specially see 'Note on My Visit to Tehri State'. Other sources which substantiate this are File No. 242, AISPC Papers, NMML which contains the correspondence of Chandra Singh Gadhwali, member of the Communist Party with the AISPC, Delhi; and copy of unsigned letter from President, AISPC, Delhi to the Chief Minister, Tehri Garhwal State dated 15.03.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML, which calls for an alliance between the Praja Mandals and the Hill States against the "conspiracy of the communists".

59. *Ibid*.

60. File No. 242, AISPC Papers, NMML.

61. Copy of unsigned letter from President, AISPC, Delhi to the Chief Minister, Tehri Garhwal State dated 15.03.1947, op.cit.

Jubbal and Keonthal. On the other hand, the central leadership of the All India States' Peoples' Conference made it quite clear that disruption of peace or even 'peaceful' Satyagrahas were not welcome in the new circumstances, since the Congress was about to assume power and nothing should be done to complicate matters for them. They were alarmed by the increasingly strident voices that were emerging from the local units of the Praja Mandals in the different Hill States and by their unilateral action without waiting for 'sanction' or 'permission' from the All India States' Peoples' Conference.⁶² To bring about a greater control over the working of the individual Praja Mandals in the small Hill States of the region, they increasingly started using the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council to put brakes on them.⁶³ This attempt of the central leadership of the All India States' Peoples' Conference coincided with the sharp differences between those in control of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council and those who were leading the Praja Mandals in some of the more politically active Hill States. The Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council proved only too willing to impose the controls that the central leadership wanted and in this they also found an effective tool to fortify their power and legitimacy, which was coming under increasing strain from the local activists.

One can find a sudden increase in the importance that was attached to the activities of the Himalayan hill states' Regional Council from

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- 62. Letter from Masurkar, Office Secretary, AISPC, Delhi to Padamdev Gautam, Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council dated Delhi, 15.03.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 - 63. See correspondences regarding Bushahr and Tehri Garhwal in the File No. 29 and File No. 165, of AISPC Papers, NMML, respectively. In Bushahr the rebellion in Sarahan was a result of the spontaneous action of local Praja Mandal activists and did not even have the 'sanction' of Satyadev Bushahri, the Satyagraha in March pressing for representative government did not receive AISPC's sanction, nor did a planned Satyagraha in July that year. Finally, the peasant mobilisations of the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal were crushed in February 1948 by the States' Ministry appointed Dewan of Bushahr. In Tehri Garhwal, the agitation against the revenue settlement and the continued imposition of Begar had begun at the initiative of the local activists. When they were imprisoned, the AISPC leadership tried to defuse the confrontation between the Praja Mandal and the Tehri *Durbar* through a negotiated compromise.

the last few months of 1946. It became the arena for the first battle between the Padamdev Gautam and Satyadev Bushahri factions of the Bushahr Praja Mandal when the former, using his position of General Secretary of the Himalayan hill states' Regional Council, refused to acknowledge or accept the application of the Satyadev Bushahri group for affiliation to the All India States' Peoples' Conference.⁶⁴ Later in March 1947, when the Satyadev Bushahri faction wanted to launch a Satyagraha in Bushahr for representative government, a convergence of interests between the All India States' Peoples' Conference leadership and the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council leadership saw a concerted attempt to stop it.⁶⁵ They first refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Satyadev Bushahri led Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal and then sent repeated telegraphic messages⁶⁶ to the Praja Mandal activists in Rampur to wait for 'official sanction' from the central leadership, before beginning the Satyagraha. The Tehri Praja Mandal faced a similar situation.

In Sirmaur, which had witnessed the intense and long drawn out rebellion in Pajhauta pargana in 1942–43, the politics which was dominant in the neighbouring Hill States of Bushahr and Tehri Garhwal did not find any takers and the local Praja Mandal remained firmly under the control of Parmar. Forty two prisoners convicted during the repression of the Pajhauta rebellion remained in jail till well after 15th August, 1947.⁶⁷ The Sirmaur Praja Mandal remained an

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- 64. Letter from Purn Anand, President, Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated 01.01.1947, op.cit.; letter from Girjadhar Prasad Negi, General Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated Rampur, 26.03.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
 - 65. Letter from Masurkar, Office Secretary, AISPC, Delhi to Padamdev Gautam, Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council dated 15.03.1947, op.cit.
 - 66. *Ibid.*
 - 67. There seems to have been a general demand for releasing all political prisoners of Sirmaur State on the occasion of Indian independence but this was not accepted by the Durbar, see letter from S.N. Ramaul, President, Sirmaur Praja Mandal to Hon'ble Member, Home and States Department, Government of India dated Nahan, 22.08.1947, File No. 161, AISPC Papers, NMML. All of them had been released in installments by March 1948, except for Vaid Surat Singh, who was considered the most senior leader of the Pajhauta rebels, letter from Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramaiah,

active body, successfully putting pressure on the State authorities to establish a semi-legislative body with a majority of elected members.⁶⁸ It boycotted the first election for this body because the electoral college was restricted, full legislative powers were not given to the elected members and the administration took an openly hostile attitude towards the Praja Mandal.⁶⁹ The Sirmaur Praja Mandal took part in the bye-election held for the Nahan town seat in December 1947. Apart from the Praja Mandal candidate, the brother of the Chief Minister of Sirmaur and one independent took part.⁷⁰ The State's administrative machinery was used openly to canvass votes for the 'official' candidate. A few hundred Muslims, who had decided to leave for Pakistan were held back with the promise of safe passage if they voted for the 'official' candidate before leaving.⁷¹ The Sirmaur Praja Mandal lost this election, but so did the 'official' candidate. The surprise victory of the independent candidate was taken as a victory of the popular demand for representative government and merger with the Indian Union, which had been delayed till then.⁷²

Sirmaur is an instructive example, since it was the only Praja Mandal under the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council, which

Vice-President, AISPC to Maharaj Sahib, Sirmaur dated Delhi 01.04.1948, op.cit. He was released only after the administration of the State was taken over by the Government of India on the 16th of April 1948, but he along with six others still had not been returned their land, which had been attached and auctioned in 1942, till the end of that month, letter from S.N. Ramaul, President, Sirmaur Praja Mandal to Hon'ble Member, States Ministry, Government of India dated Nahan, 29.04.1948, op.cit. The land, it seems from oral testimony of some Praja Mandal activists collected in 1995, seems to have been returned at some time but no documentary evidence could be found, Vaid Surat Singh having died in 1990.

68. This had been acceded by the State as far back as November 1946, see letter, along with enclosures, from S.N. Ramaul, General Secretary, Sirmaur Praja Mandal to Dr. Dwarkanath Kachru, AISPC, Delhi dated Nahan, 20.11.1947, op.cit.

69. *Ibid.*

70. Letter from Y.S. Parmar, President, Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council to President, AISPC, Delhi dated Simla, 29.12.1947, op.cit.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*

consistently carried on an agitational programme from roughly the time the Bushahr and Tehri Garhwal Praja Mandals became active, but was never part of their 'middle peasant caucus'. Its agitational programmes highlighted only two points, first representative government and second, release of the Pajhauta prisoners.⁷³ This Praja Mandal held village level meetings,⁷⁴ organised Praja Sammelans during local fairs and trade gatherings,⁷⁵ and was active in opening new units in areas where it did not have a presence.⁷⁶ It is also apparent that there was a fair amount of popular support for the Sirmaur Praja Mandal and its activities. The main reasons for the political distance between the Praja Mandals of Sirmaur on the one side and Bushahr and Tehri Garhwal on the other, were the absence of the Pajhauta rebels in prison and the dominant and domineering personality of Parmar. Sirmaur is an instructive example also because it indicates that while there was a clear trend towards class differentiation in peasant politics within the Praja Mandal framework, it was far from crystallised on the ground, where the presence or absence of a few individuals could decide political agendas.

Over the twenty months, between the revival of political activism in the Western Himalayas and the final showdown between the two groups in February of 1948, the relative distance between their politics increased despite the efforts of the central leadership of the All India States' Peoples' Conference and Simla City Congress Committee. There was a growing radicalisation of the newer leadership. This was evident in its coming closer to the Communist Party in Tehri Garhwal and the manner in which it mobilised the landless Dagi-Kolis in Bushahr. It was the confrontation that developed between the *Dewan* of Bushahr, appointed after independence, by the government of

73. *Ibid.*; also see letter from S.N. Ramaul, President, Sirmaur Praja Mandal to Hon'ble Member, Home and States Department, Government of India dated Nahan, 22.08.1947, op.cit.

74. Letter from S.N. Ramaul, General Secretary, Sirmaur Praja Mandal to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated Nahan, 22.12.1947, op.cit.

75. Copy of Representation to Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, President, AISPC by the Sirmaur Praja Mandal dated New Delhi, 03.05.1946, op.cit.; two page report on the activities of the Sirmaur Praja Mandal, written by S.N. Ramaul, General Secretary dated 26.12.1947, op.cit.

76. *Ibid.*

India, and the Praja Mandal over the demands of the Dagi-Koli Bethus, which led to the final struggle between the two factions of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council over political pre-eminence in the Western Himalayas.

The general secretary of Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, Anulal Dhairak, led the mobilisation of the Dagi-Kolis who were classified as Bethus in the revenue records.⁷⁷ They were entered as tenants-at-will of their landlord. Most Bethus were tenants-at-will of the Raja or his family *Jagirs*. A smaller number of Bethus were linked to the proprietary peasantry, but this link was crucial to the solvency of the peasant agricultural economy. Therefore, the services of the Bethus were highly prized and not easily given up. Apart from Bushahr of 1947–48, there is no other example in the entire colonial history of the Western Himalayas of the Khash-Kanet peasantry raising the demands for the abolition of Beth tenures or the other ‘disabilities’ of the landless Dagi-Koli labourers and artisans of their villages. In fact, even in Bushahr it is doubtful how enthusiastic the peasantry was to the agenda of Beth reforms being incorporated in the Praja Mandal agitations.⁷⁸ This antipathy towards the Dagi-Kolis may have been a contributory factor in the continuation of the division in the State’s Praja Mandal. It is not easy to explain the reason for the inclusion of the demand for abolition of Beth tenure and other disabilities of the Dagi-Kolis by the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal from the available evidence.⁷⁹ But it does indicate the growing radicalisation of the Praja Mandal.

77. See Chapter 2, footnote 3.

78. The leaders of the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal made distinctions between mobilisations of peasants and State subjects in general and of Kolis and Dalits in particular, see letter from Satyadev Bushahri, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to General Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal dated 15.01.1947, op.cit. The State officials too made a distinction between the agitations by the peasantry in general and by the Kolis in particular, see telegram from Chetram Thakur, Sessions Judge, Rampur Bushahr to Dr. Parmar, c/o AISPC, Delhi dated 03.04.1948, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.

79. It should be noted that demands for the abolition of Beth did get raised by the different Praja Mandals in the 1940s and it also became the subject of one resolution passed by the All India States’ Peoples’ Conference in

It was during one propaganda tour of Anulal Dhairak among the Bethus, that the Dewan of Bushahr, Sardar Baldev Singh, sent police to arrest him for fermenting disturbances.⁸⁰ When the police party, which consisted of one officer and six constables, took Anulal into custody the Bethus and peasantry of the village where he was arrested rebelled. They captured the policemen and tied them up, releasing Anulal from his handcuffs.⁸¹ They started marching towards Rampur, the capital of the State and the number of Bethus and peasants grew in size as they neared the town. Six miles from Rampur, the District Magistrate and some other State officials, who went to negotiate in the absence of Sardar Baldev Singh, met them. The police accompanying this official party, fired on a delegation of the peasants and Bethus who were approaching them, leading to the death of two persons and the subsequent 'capture' of the entire official party by the rebels. The lives of the policemen, who had fired, were saved by the intervention of Anulal who took them into his personal custody. This victorious mass of landless Bethus and proprietary peasants, numbering around three thousands marched towards the town. The news of their approach led to a general panic among the many shopkeepers, traders, government officials etc. in the town, many of whom fled to their villages. The rebels locked all the government offices, put the captured officials in prison and strutted about the town declaring that finally independence had arrived.⁸²

When news reached Sardar Baldev Singh about the happenings in Bushahr, he advanced to Rampur with a contingent of armed Punjab

its session at Gwalior in 1947, see 'List of Resolutions Passed' File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML, pg. 375.

80. This entire event is reconstructed from (i) letter from Satyadev Bushahri, President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Ministry of States, Government of India undated, but received on 02.03.1948; (ii) letter from Saran Das, Office Secretary, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramaiah, Vice-President, AISPC, Delhi dated 26.03.1948; (iii) telegram from Chetram Thakur, Sessions Judge, Rampur Bushahr to Dr. Parmar, op.cit.; (iv) Report on Disturbances in Bushahr State, filed in AISPC, Delhi, undated, all from File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*

Police.⁸³ They ransacked the town, beat up everybody found in the streets, threw Anulal from the second floor office of the Praja Mandal where they found him, and thus dispersed the mass of rebels.⁸⁴ It was reported that nine people lost their lives in this operation, six of them by jumping into the Sutlej while running away from the police beatings.⁸⁵ While this action cost Sardar Baldev Singh his job, the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal was effectively destroyed and was soon replaced by the Indian National Congress, which started units in all the Hill States after their merger subsequent to the Suket Satyagraha.

The Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council, which had remained dormant till the summer of 1946, became the centre of popular politics and the doorway to accessing the crowned successors of the British. It was for all these reasons and more that the 10th June 1947 elections for the Himalayan hill states' Regional Council executive and office bearers were so keenly contested. In this election, as had been noted above, control passed from the older generation of leaders into the hands of the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal led by Satyadev Bushahri, members of the Tehri Praja Mandal and various other new activists like Bhagmal Sautha. The new leadership used their control of the Himalayan hill states' Regional Council to develop links with the central leadership and also provide legitimacy, support and cover to the activities of those Praja Mandals who were finding their attempts at initiating mass movements thwarted by the older leadership.⁸⁶ The

83. *Ibid.*

84. *Ibid.*

85. *Ibid.*

86. They managed to enlist the support of Venkat Rao, Organising Secretary, AISPC, who had been sent to resolve the internal problems of various Praja Mandals of the Western Himalayas and also to start new units in Hill States which did not have any popular organisation. Some of his actions, specially regarding Bushahr affairs and the legitimacy of the newly elected Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council, went against the positions of Parmar and Padamdev Gautam. Soon he became the centre of bitter acrimony between these two groups, with Parmar and Padamdev Gautam boycotting him and demanding his recall and a probe into his mis-deeds from the central leadership. See Report on Affairs of Himalayan Region, File No. 62, AISPC Papers, NMML, which contains voluminous correspondence between Venkat Rao, the Parmar group and the central leadership over his conduct and the state of Praja Mandals in the Western Himalayas.

leaders who had been eased out of the Himalayan hill states' Regional Council still retained influence both with a sizeable section of local political opinion and with a majority of the central leadership.⁸⁷ They dominated Praja Mandals in important Hill States like Sirmaur and in the Praja Mandals of Mandi and Bilaspur they retained the confidence of the majority. But the dominance of Tehri Garhwal in terms of population and membership effectively made it the deciding Praja Mandal in controlling the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council. After 15th August, 1947 events moved with great speed towards either the merger of all the Hill States of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council into one 'Himalayan Prant' or the establishment of representative government in them individually. The older leadership, which had just lost control of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council, did not have time to reassert its dominance within the time of the few months before these changes came into effect. Moreover, the radical political agenda of the new leadership of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council was proving to be popular with larger masses of the region's peasantry.⁸⁸ In this situation, it seemed a distinct possibility that this older leadership would lose the main levers of political power in the new structures that were threatening them with their imminence. It became imperative to regain the popular support for their leadership.

Padamdev Gautam and Yashwant Singh Parmar followed a three-point strategy to reduce the influence of the Satyadev Bushahri led

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87. A study of the sources shows that the Y.S. Parmar – Padamdev Gautam group had the sympathies and support of Jainarayan Vyas, Dwarkanath Kachru, Pattabhi Sitaramaiah, Hiralal Shastri and Masurkar among those of the AISPC who were directly involved in Himalayan affairs. Only Venkat Rao, the organising secretary, supported the other group.
 88. By the autumn and winter of 1947 Satyadev Bushahri, Bhagmal Sautha and Paripurnanand were touring Hill States like Suket, Mandi, Nalagarh and Bilaspur where they received spontaneous support from the Praja Mandal activists and hostility from the State authorities. Both were symptoms of their growing acceptability in areas where they did not even have any contact till some months ago. See letters from Satyadev Bushahri to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated 05.12.1947 and 09.12.1947 describing in detail their visits to these Hill States and the political conditions there, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.

group in the politics of the region. At one level, they started a concerted effort to render the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council an ineffective body. At another level, they launched a massive movement to introduce popular government and end repression in the Hill States of Suket by involving Praja Mandal workers from all the Hill States of the region. Lastly, they used their influence with the States Ministry and the administration of the Hill States to crush the movements launched by the other group, which demanded an end to the revenue system of high taxes and Begar along with the introduction of representative government. In this strategy they seem to have been quite successful.

The most important component of the strategy of the Padamdev Gautam-Yashwant Singh Parmar group was to reduce the influence of the Satyadev Bushahri faction on the politics of the region and their control of the Regional Council. Since elections were a route closed for them, due to the clear majority of Bushahr and Tehri Garhwal in the electoral college, they floated another Council which was initially composed of self nominated members. This new Regional Council was named the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council.⁸⁹ The only difference in the composition of this 'Sub'-Regional Council and the earlier Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council was that Tehri Praja Mandal was not included in this, since Tehri Garhwal State did not form part of the Punjab Hill States of which the Simla Hill States were

89. The first indication of the impossibility of both these groups working together in the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council is found in the 'Personal' letter from Parmar to Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramaiah, President, AISPC, Delhi dated Simla, 14.06.1947, File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML; this position is clarified in the letter from L.D. Verma, General Secretary, Himalayan States Sub-Regional Council, Simla to the President, AISPC, Delhi dated 18.06.1947, op.cit., where the formation of this new body is announced and the intention of its members to communicate directly with the AISPC central leadership is recorded. It claimed that the election to the office bearers of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council, held on 10th June was improper and the house was divided almost equally among those who accepted the election results and those who did not. Therefore it had become impossible to work the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council. This new sub-council claimed the affiliation of all the Praja Mandal which comprised the Regional Council. Later its letter head proclaimed it to be the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council.

a part. Interestingly, they included those Hill States of the Punjab, which did not form part of the British defined Simla Hill States like Chamba, Suket and Mandi.⁹⁰ The ostensible reason for the formation of this new body was the specific needs and historical ties of the Hill States, which formed the Simla Hill States and the supposed lack of historical ties with Tehri Garhwal.⁹¹ That this was a specious reason can be made out from the inclusion of Chamba, a Hill States bordering Pathankot and Jammu and which was separated by the Dhauladhar range, in this group but the exclusion of Tehri Garhwal which had a border with Bushahr, Jubbal and Keonthal.

The Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council was initially formed of self nominated members which included Padamdev Gautam, Yashwant Singh Parmar and their associates. This body was granted recognition by the All India States' Peoples' Conference almost as soon as it started working.⁹² This recognition to the Simla hill states Sub-Regional Council was made easier due to the absence of any objection from the leadership of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council. The latter did not perceive the formation of this new body as a threat to their position, since nominally it remained under the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council and they were gaining support from increasing numbers of Praja Mandals workers. But once the Simla Hill

90. *Ibid.*

91. The other group, it seems, tried to force matters in the other direction. In a public meeting called by the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal in Rohru Tehsil and attended by around 1000 peasants a unanimous resolution was passed. This called for the Congress appointed Dewan of Bushahr to follow democratic principles and not administer the State on old bureaucratic methods. It objected to attempts at merging the Hill States into Punjab or a separate Patiala State. It demanded the formation of a Himalaya Prant comprising all the Hill States from Chamba to Tehri Garhwal. It also proclaimed that if that was not feasible then Bushahr, Jubbal and Tehri Garhwal should be merged into UP as one unit. It repeatedly warned against splintering these last three Hill States, claiming that they shared strong commonality of language, economic resources, kin relations and geography. See Resolution (Urdu) passed at Public Meeting in Rohru, dated 28.03.1948, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.

92. Letter from Y.S. Parmar, President, Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council to Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramaiah, President, AISPC, Delhi dated Simla, 12.09.1947, File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML.

States Sub-Regional Council was formed, those involved with it started claiming the affiliation of the Praja Mandals of the Punjab Hill States which was earlier vested with the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council. The Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council claimed that while it was the legitimate body to grant affiliation to the local Praja Mandals, the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council should deal with it and grant affiliation to those Praja Mandals which were not part of it but were part of the Himalayan region.⁹³ Thus the formation of the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council opened up an alternative route to the local Praja Mandals for those, who had lost the elections to the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council and made it easier for those Praja Mandals, which were against the Satyadev Bushahri faction to unite. Once this Sub-Regional Council received legitimacy from the All India States' Peoples' Conference its leaders stopped attending the meetings of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council on various excuses, thus rendering that body an exclusive domain of the Satyadev Bushahri group who seem to have initially relished the absence of their rivals.

It was only after this alternative organisational structure to the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council was firmly in place that the other two components of the Padamdev Gautam-Parmar group's strategy could work.

In February 1948, when it became apparent that a major confrontation was developing between the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal and the Indian National Congress vetted, States' Ministry appointed, *Dewan* of Bushahr, the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council chalked out its own agitational programme. This was decided in the last week of January 1948 and the dates finalised in direct communication with the central leadership of the All India States' Peoples' Conference, without taking the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council into confidence. By now the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council had become a largely discredited body, with its executive not being able to hold even one meeting since its election in June 1947, due to the confrontation between the two groups. It was

93. Resolution passed at a meeting of Himalayan Hill States Praja Mandal workers at Simla dated 11.10.1947, op.cit.

officially led by those who were close to the political positions of Satyadev Bushahri group.

The showdown in Bushahr, with the simultaneous Suket Satyagraha was the climax in the struggle between the two distinct political positions within the Praja Mandals of the Western Himalayas. It led to the group led by Parmar and Padamdev Gautam assuming power in the type C State of Himachal that was formed by merging the areas of the Punjab Hill States minus Tehri Garhwal. This signalled the definite marginalisation of the more radical politics, which, as has been argued, represented an immature middle peasant position, espoused by Satyadev Bushahri, Bhagmal Sautha and the Tehri Praja Mandal.

Much of the energy of the nationalist leadership of the Western Himalayas, which consisted almost entirely of the Praja Mandal activists, had been spent in fighting each other over control over the organisation. Therefore, when independence came and the protective umbrella of the Paramount Power was removed from the Hill States of the region, the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council and its constitutive units were totally unprepared to take advantage of the situation. Initially none of the Hill States agreed to a merger with the Indian Union, and neither was there much movement towards representative government within the boundaries of the individual Hill States. Satyadev Bushahri was completely involved in the activities of Bushahr, where the Interim Council of Administration, which had been appointed by the British Political Agent before independence continued to dilly-dally with the elections which had been promised at the successful conclusion of the Satyagraha in March that year. First, they refused to hold these elections and later, they used the excuse of a dispute between the Satyadev Bushahri and Padamdev Gautam factions over the Rohru elections to withhold the constitution of the elected constituent assembly.⁹⁴ The Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal

94. The elections were finally held in July after the Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal issued a threat of Satyagraha to the Bushahr authorities and pressure was put on them by the Congress leadership which did not want to involve itself in agitations at the moment of independence. The constituent assembly was not called to session even till February 1948, when the Rani Sahiba of Bushahr brokered a deal for installation of a 'popular' Praja Mandal ministry in Bushahr which was to hold elections.

led by Satyadev Bushahri, which was the only mass organisation in the State, was completely involved in forcing the Interim Council of Administration to accept their version of the events in Rohru and announce the election results, which they had won.⁹⁵ With the coming of independence, the situation became more complicated since factions within the royal family emerged into public life and aligned themselves with one or the other faction of the Praja Mandal.⁹⁶

The Tehri Praja Mandal was in disarray. Its agitation against the proceedings of the land revenue settlement of 1946 had landed most of its leadership in jail. Only lower level activists remained scattered in different parts of the State and they could not launch effective agitations either for the release of their leaders or for merger. Some parts of the local unit of the Communist Party tried to align with the remnants of the Praja Mandal and launch agitations.⁹⁷ This was not successful, though it is not possible to say with any surety about the reasons for its failure. The organisational weakness of the Communists, who could not shoulder the entire agitation on their own may have been the primary cause, apart from the strong opposition from many Tehri Praja Mandal leaders.⁹⁸ At the time when independence came, the All India States' Peoples' Conference had managed to secure the release of some of the Praja Mandal leaders in jail through a negotiated compromise with the Tehri Garhwal *Durbar*. Some other political prisoners had signed 'good conduct' bonds, which

Letters from Satyadev Bushahri, President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to President, Delhi branch, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal, dated 07.07.1947; to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated 09.07.1947; to Dewan, Bushahr State dated 09.02.1948; Order of the Board of Regency Bushahr, signed by Rajmata Bushahr, Raja of Keonthal and Raja of Jubbal, dated 18.02.1948, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.

95. Letter from Satyadev Bushahri, President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated 17.10.1947, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
96. Unsigned copy of letter from President, Bushahr Rajya Praja Mandal to Rajmata Sahiba, Bushahr, dated 26.12.1947; telegram from Capt. Ram Singh Bushahri to Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramaiah dated 16.12.1948, File No. 29, AISPC Papers, NMML.
97. File No. 242, AISPC Papers, NMML, op.cit.
98. Letter from K.N. Gairola to Jainarayan Vyas dated Kanpur, 10.09.1946, File No. 165, AISPC Papers, NMML.

forbade political work and secured their release. A few, led by Paripurnanand, had escaped from the State's prison and lived in exile in Delhi or Dehra Dun. The Communists accused the central leadership of the All India States' Peoples' Conference of sabotaging the popular movement in Tehri Garhwal and coming to a compromise with the Tehri *Durbar* which left the demands of the people unattended.⁹⁹ Those who had been released on 'good conduct' bonds became irrelevant to the Praja Mandal. Those who had been released under the negotiated compromise and those who were living in exile in Dehra Dun, were only active outside the State. Within the State the Praja Mandal remained in disarray, pulled in different directions by the two different groups of the Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council, by the Communists and by the temptations offered by the *Durbar* in some form of power sharing outside the organisational framework of the Praja Mandal.

Similarly, the Sirmaur Praja Mandal was fighting for the release of the Pajhauta prisoners, for representative government and merger with the Indian Union. Suket,¹⁰⁰ Bilaspur,¹⁰¹ Mandi¹⁰² and Nalagarh¹⁰³ witnessed similar agitations by the local Praja Mandals, though at a much lower scale to what was experienced in Bushahr, Tehri Garhwal and Sirmaur. What comes out of this ensemble of local level activities is that there was a complete lack of a regional level plan of action or vision, which could have united the different Praja Mandals. The Himalayan Hill States' Regional Council had become inactive due to the internecine struggles, while the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council was very much a sectarian body in its composition, and therefore could not carry the entire Western Himalayan peasant leadership. The central leadership of the All India States' Peoples'

99. File No. 242, AISPC Papers, NMML, op.cit.

100. Copy of Resolutions passed by Suket Praja Mandal, dated 04.01.1947; Press release 'Suket State' issued by Y.S. Parmar, dated Amritsar, 21.01.1948, File No. 163, AISPC Papers, NMML. Also see letters from Satyadev Bushahri to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated 05.12.1947 and 09.12.1947, op.cit.

101. *Ibid.*

102. *Ibid.*

103. Minutes of meeting of Nalagarh State Praja Mandal, Simla branch, dated 15.03.1948, File No. 64, AISPC Papers, NMML.

Conference, the Indian National Congress and the Government of India were too busy to worry about the petty Hill States of the Western Himalayas. The situation was ripe for political stagnation and that is precisely how Parmar described the situation in one of his letters to Pattabhi Sitaramaiah in November 1947.¹⁰⁴ Parmar and his associates would have felt the acuteness of this political stagnation most. They found that while their attempts at getting the States' Ministry and central leadership of the All India States' Peoples' Conference to pressurise the Hill States to merge into a single 'Himalayan Prant' were unsuccessful,¹⁰⁵ their mass base was being eroded by the local, but increasingly militant, struggles of the radical faction.¹⁰⁶ Apart from this, the rulers of the different Hill States were beginning to realise the inevitability of political changes consequent to their accession to the Indian Union, and therefore were rushing through with elections in their individual States.¹⁰⁷

The rulers of the bigger Hill States, like Bushahr, Sirmaur, Mandi, Nalagarh, Bilaspur, etc. were aiming at merging their Hill States as separate entities within the Indian Union which, they assumed, would enable them to preserve their position better than if their territories were amalgamated to form a single unit. Such a splintering of the

104. Letter from Y.S. Parmar to Hiralal Shastri, General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated Simla, 22.11.1947, File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML.

105. By the end of 1947 no Hill State had formally agreed to a merger of their independent States into the Himalayan Prant and many were openly and actively attempting to shore up political opinions which championed their independent status within the Indian Union. See V. Verma, *The Emergence of Himachal Pradesh: A Survey of Constitutional Developments*, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 105–6, 111–3.

106. Letters from Satyadev Bushahri to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated 05.12.1947 and 09.12.1947, op.cit.

107. File No. 64, op.cit. contains many references to the hurried elections, often opposed by the local Praja Mandal, that were organised different Hill States in the Simla region. Koti, Jubbal, Baghat, Baghal, and Theog would be among those which attempted some form of 'constitutional monarchy' in their Hill State. Bushahr and Sirmaur already had moved some way towards representative government in their territories, but not enough to convince the Praja Mandal of their motives. Suket, Bilaspur, Nalagarh and Tehri Garhwal were refusing to give in to any demands for popular government, while the stand of Mandi and Chamba is not clear.

region into numerous small States, each with its own unique representative government, would have implied an impossible patchwork of political boundaries and powers.¹⁰⁸ This threatened the growing strength of the Praja Mandals, which was based on its ability to transcend these very boundaries, though still in an imperfect manner. The very fact of the continuation of the old boundaries of these Hill States would allow each ruler to maintain his hold on the population of the State.

In the first few months after independence, the dominant group of Parmar and Padamdev Gautam, attempted to come to an understanding or compromise with the rulers. They proposed the formation of a 'Himalayan Prant',¹⁰⁹ which would be formed by merging all the Hill States of Punjab and governed by an elected majority in its legislature. The rulers were promised special powers, initially in the form of a separate legislative body like the present day legislative council.¹¹⁰ It seems that this attempt received some encouragement from sections of the rulers and the All India States' Peoples' Conference. But with the division within the Praja Mandals and the ambiguous attitude of the Government of India towards the future political arrangements of the region, almost all the rulers of the large Hill States decided to tread a solitary path.¹¹¹ This drift of the rulers towards forming separate constitutional monarchies led to the hardening of their positions vis-à-vis the Praja Mandals. When the attempts at arriving at a negotiated settlement between the rulers of the Hill States and the different Praja Mandals, led by the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council started failing, these rulers started

108. Specially since many of the Hill States were legally feudatories of larger neighbours and some were so small that their population numbered only in a few hundreds. See the discussion in V. Verma, op.cit., chapter 7.

109. *Ibid.* Chapter 6 and 7.

110. *Ibid.*

111. Letter from Rana Bashisht Singh Chand, Rana of Koti State to Secretary, Ministry of States dated Kiar Darbar, 22.03.1948; letter from Jawaharlal Sehgal, President, Praja Parishad Solan to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated 05.02.1948; letter from President, Baghat Raya Praja Mandal to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated Solan, 22.01.1948; letter from Kartar Singh, Chief Minister, Jubbal State to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated Jubbal, 20.12.1947; File No. 64, op.cit.

repressing their activities in the run upto elections for representative government within their States.¹¹² In this situation, it became imperative that the Parmar–Padamdev Gautam group regained their political initiative, which seemed to be slowly slipping out of their hands during the course of this negotiated settlement with the rulers.

There seemed to be two options before the leadership of the Himalayan Praja Mandals.¹¹³ One was to reach some form of an understanding between the two factions and agitate jointly for the creation of a ‘Himalaya Prant’. Two, staking out their individual claims to the leadership of the region through separate political actions aimed at the same goal of a merger of the Hill States into one unit. The first had become the favoured option of a majority of the All India States’ Peoples’ Conference, but it could not be actualised on the ground for two main reasons. First, the inability of the Parmar group to any form of power sharing with the new leadership and second, their confidence about their ability to simultaneously sideline the rival faction while forcing a merger on the rulers of the Hill States.

The administration of the three Hill States of Bilaspur, Nalagarh and Suket showed the least interest in granting representative government or in merger of their territories into a single province. Over the winter of 1947–48 it became clear that a showdown between the Praja Mandals and these States would take place. Praja Mandal activists were regularly arrested, their meetings and organisational work disrupted by the States’ police, their leaders, whether Parmar or Satyadev Bushahri, were denied entry within these States and they refused to accept the Praja Mandal as the political representatives of the their subjects.¹¹⁴ The local Praja Mandals of these Hill States continued their allegiance to the newly formed Simla Hill States Sub-

112. Two page report on the activities of the Sirmaur Praja Mandal, written by S.N. Ramaul, General Secretary dated 26.12.1947, op.cit.; Letters from Satyadev Bushahri to General Secretary, AISPC, Delhi dated 05.12.1947 and 09.12.1947, op.cit.; Copy of resolutions passed at a public meeting held under the auspices of the Himalayan States People’s Conference under the Presidentship of Rana Jung Bahadur Singh, Editor, Tribune, on 04.01.1948, File No. 63, AISPC Papers, NMML.

113. V. Verma, op.cit. has a good discussion on this.

114. *Ibid.*, chapter 7.

Regional Council, and were thus in the sphere of influence of the dominant group.

In the second week of February 1948, the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council formed the Himalayan Prant Provisional Government at a meeting at Simla. They gave notice to the Raja of Suket that a Satyagraha would be launched from the 18th of that month if the Raja did not agree for merger with the newly formed Provisional Government and stop repression of political activists of the Praja Mandal.¹¹⁵ As had been the case for the past few months, the Suket authorities responded by arresting some of the Praja Mandal leaders and started harassing those who were known as its sympathisers.¹¹⁶ Parmar and Padamdev Gautam started mobilising Praja Mandal activists from all the Hill States of the Sutlej basin. The plan was to enter Suket in a large body of men and peacefully take over its administration. Suket was to prove the test case. If the local Praja Mandal and the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council were able to force the state authorities to their demands it was believed that other Hill States too would fall in line.

Suket was chosen carefully as the venue for the only and deciding Satyagraha launched by the Parmar group. It was relatively smaller among the large Hill States of the region and longitudinally shaped.¹¹⁷ It was bounded by the Sutlej river in the south-east, its north-western boundary was formed the high Dhauladhar range which divided it from Kullu. The south-western part of the state comprised the flat plain called 'Balh' which linked it to Mandi and Bilaspur. Through this part of Suket passed the Simla-Kangra highway. It was thus possible for three parties of Satyagrahis to move in from Mandi, Simla and Suket's northern tip, Tattapani. Suket was geographically also at the centre of the region which comprised the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council, and which was sought by them to be merged into the Himalayan Prant. It was relatively close to Simla town with easy communication with Punjab and Kangra, thus making it possible for

115. Press Release issued by Y.S. Parmar, dated Simla, 16.02.1948, File No. 163, AISPC Papers, NMML.

116. Telegram from Y.S. Parmar to AISPC, Delhi dated 18.02.1948, File No. 163, op.cit.

117. All information about Suket is taken from *Gazetteer of the Suket State*, compiled by B.R. Beotra, 1927 (reprinted Delhi, 1997).

the leadership of the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council to monitor events on an almost hourly basis. Its borders with Bilaspur and Mandi and its proximity to Nalagarh also made it a good example for the Rajas of these Hill States.

The first party of Satyagrahis comprising Praja Mandal workers from the Simla Hill States and Simla town entered Suket at Tattapani on 18th February.¹¹⁸ They numbered a little more than one thousand and overpowered, without any force, the six policemen, the lone *tehsildar* and the two government clerks at that place. The same day the Satyagrahis had taken control of the town of Karsog, the second most important place in Suket and the primary settlement on its mountainous region.¹¹⁹ This swift and peaceful victory of the Satyagrahis electrified the peasantry of the entire state, raised the morale of the Praja Mandal workers and sent panic into the administrations of the Hill States. Within four days their numbers had swelled to five thousand.¹²⁰ By 22nd February another party of a thousand Satyagrahis had entered Suket from the south through the Simla-Kangra highway.¹²¹ Both these groups of Satyagrahis met about six miles from the state capital Sundernagar, and by then their combined strength of exuberant peasants and determined Praja Mandal workers exceeded any popular gathering within the Western Himalayas in living memory.¹²² Parmar had stayed in Simla, where he received hourly reports of the unfolding events in Suket through telephone and runners. He sent directions to the Satyagrahis in Suket and kept up communication with the All India States' Peoples' Conference and States' Ministry in Delhi informing them of the events in Suket. By the 25th of February, the Satyagrahis who were camping outside Sundernagar town had become extremely restive after

118. Telegram from Y.S. Parmar to AISPC, Delhi dated 18.02.1948, File No. 163, op.cit.; Telegram from Y.S. Parmar to AISPC, Delhi dated 19.02.1948, File No. 163, op.cit.

119. *Ibid.*

120. Press Release issued by Y.S. Parmar, dated Simla, 25.02.1948, File No. 163, op.cit.

121. Telegram from Y.S. Parmar to AISPC, Delhi dated 23.02.1948, File No. 163, op.cit.

122. Telegram from Shivanand Rattan Singh, President, Suket Praja Mandal to AISPC, Delhi dated 18.02.1948, File No. 163, op.cit.

reports came in that the Raja had removed all the wealth from the State treasury and was preparing the police for a final assault on mostly unarmed peasants. In this situation, where a confrontation between the Suket authorities and Satyagrahis would have led to a large number of casualties, it became imperative for the Government of India to act swiftly.¹²³ It removed the Raja of Suket from the administration of the state and brought it under PEPSU till further orders.

This decision of the Government of India was executed by the Commissioner of Kangra with the help of one contingent of the army and one of the Punjab Armed Police. It was perhaps the first time the army and police had been used in an unambiguous manner against any Hill State, and it clearly showed the change in Indian politics to both the Hill States and to its peasantry.

The Suket Satyagraha set the ball rolling and within the next few weeks all the Hill States comprising the present day Himachal Pradesh fell like ninepins to the demand for merger.¹²⁴ With the exception of Bilaspur, which still managed to get separate recognition as a type C State of the Indian Union,¹²⁵ every other Hill State under Punjab was merged into a single State called Himachal Pradesh. Tehri Garhwal was kept out of it, since the Parmar group, which was firmly in control after the success of the Suket Satyagraha, did not want to get swamped by the large population of that State and the large membership of its Praja Mandal.¹²⁶ Without the support of the Tehri Praja Mandal and the numerical strength of its membership, the Satyadev Bushahri group, which had taken a battering in its base of Bushahr, became further weakened. Also with the creation of the State of Himachal Pradesh, bodies like the Himalayan hill states' Regional Council and

123. Press Release issued by Y.S. Parmar, dated Simla, 25.02.1948, File No. 163, op.cit.

124. V. Verma, op.cit., pp. 122–23.

125. *Ibid.*, pp. 124–25.

126. *Ibid.*, chapter 7, pp. 109–26, contains a comprehensive and nuanced account of the manner in which the factionalism between the Satyadev Bushahri group and the Parmar / Padamdev Gautam group developed within the Praja Mandals of the Western Himalayas and the manner in which this rivalry impacted on the eventual formation and composition of the State of Himachal Pradesh.

the Simla Hill States Sub-Regional Council became irrelevant. Marginalised in the Praja Mandal movement and kept out of political power in the new State, the Satyadev Bushahri group lost much of its clout even among those who had formed its core constituency, the middle peasants and the small peasant–landless labourer multitudes. The prime reason for this loss of support among these sections was the underdeveloped differentiation between the rich and middle peasant and the ritual distance between the latter and the Dagi-Koli small peasants, landless labourers and village menials. The ties of *bhaichara*, discussed in a previous chapter, were still stronger than the emergent class differentiations, and therefore the rich peasant leadership did not face too much difficulty in co-opting the middle peasants as a class without co-opting their new-born leadership. Some individuals of the Satyadev Bushahri group eventually managed a foothold in the Congress politics of Himachal Pradesh but most, including Satyadev Bushahri, remained perpetually in opposition politics somewhat to the left of the Congress.

Conclusion

This book has been about the story of the colonial encounter in the Western Himalayas, a region which has mostly remained outside conventional historical accounts of colonialism in India.

It has tried to argue that it is not possible to understand the history of the Western Himalayas under British rule as merely a sub-set of the larger story of how India coped with colonialism. Rather than being viewed as a region within the Indian civilisational expanse, this book suggests that the Western Himalayas represented a *border* region between India and China and it was colonialism which integrated it with the Indian Nation. Through its account of the colonial encounter in the Western Himalayas, it has tried to show that there could be an alternative way of studying colonialism and modern Indian history.

It has been a central argument of this book that it is not possible to study the Western Himalayas as a part of the historical processes of the Indian sub-continent till after decades into British rule. It followed a historical path which was removed from the rhythms of the Indo-Gangetic cultures, though it imbibed some features from the latter – both material and ideological – like it also did from Tibet. The integration of the Himalayas into the Indian nation was a specific feature of colonial rule and it is methodologically impermissible to extrapolate the social features, which are markers of this successful integration, to a period when this process had not even begun.

The predominant tendency in contemporary historiography has been to study colonialism as a pan-Indian phenomenon. Most accounts

of colonialism in South Asia, in the different disciplines of social sciences and humanities, work with an implicit notion of India as a given unity from the very beginning of the colonial encounter. This is surprising since much of the historiography of colonialism and modern India argues that India was constituted as a country and a nation during the course of colonial rule and, often, in opposition to it.¹

This has been a long accepted, well-grounded argument with an impressive amount of scholarship to back it up. Its implications – in their impact on the development of the anti-colonial struggles and in the manner this became a national movement – too have been followed up and argued out with remarkable efficacy. While these implications have been fleshed out by voluminous research, its implications for the constitution of the historical space of the Indian nation remain problematic. The social formations of the agricultural communities around the great Indian rivers have implicitly been accepted as representative and sociologically normative for India and have provided the template for placing the histories of the peoples and territories who came to constitute the British Raj. At most, qualifications are allowed but no margin is left for the existence of histories outside this grand history of India.

Large parts of what finally came to be identified as the British Indian Empire lay outside the civilisational centres of the flood plains – *border areas* stretching in a mountainous zone from Baluchistan to

1. This has been so of much of Indian Historiography of contemporary times. A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay, 1976, Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India*, Delhi, 1983 and Bipan Chandra, *et.al.*, *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, 1989 are books which take the stand that the Indian Nation was in the making during colonialism. They also contain comprehensive references for the different historiographical positions on this issue.

This position, though, has not been accepted by many nationalist historians who have accepted the existence of an Indian Nation prior to the coming of the British. Two of the most influential histories, from two widely different ideological positions, which work with a concept of an 'ancient' Indian Nation are Jawaharlal Nehru's *Discovery of India* and R.C. Majumdar, H.C. Raychaudhuri and Kalikinkar Datta's widely used textbook, *An Advanced History of India*, Madras, 1978. Both books were written in the 1940s and have seen innumerable editions and reprints.

Burma and large areas of hilly, forested and desert tracts within the mainland, dividing these civilisational centres.

Despite differences in the expressions of the caste form in different river valleys of India, historically, caste – as it developed – retained a strong structural similarity all across the sub-continent. It was organised under the four-fold varna structure, it was marked by hierarchical divisions based on occupation and descent, it was based on a family organised around strict endogamy, with settled agriculture as the anchor of rural economy.

Often the geographical spaces – hilly and forested, or even dry deserts – that lay between these cultures of the river valleys developed forms of social relations which cannot easily be classified under caste and are often referred to as tribal. The fact that there were no strict divisions but slow fading out and merging in of social forms between the caste based communities and these tribal areas has led to the postulation of the tribe-peasant continuum. This continuum is stronger in those regions where these tribal communities borrowed caste based terminology for their social hierarchies and copied some of the religious nomenclature and rituals from the nearby caste based communities.

The economic and political histories of these tribal areas – which I would prefer to term border zones – were marked by high levels of autonomy. These border zones cannot be seen as historically derivative of their neighbouring caste-agriculture regions but must be studied from a historiographically independent position. This book has attempted such an exercise.

While the history of India under colonialism is usually based on a study of these civilisational centres, there have been attempts to focus exclusively on the history of areas outside of these. Many of these attempts have come from the Subaltern Studies collective, with Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*,² David Arnold's study of the Gudem-Rampa uprisings³ and David Hardiman's *The Coming of the Devi*⁴ being the most representative

2. Delhi, 1992.

3. David Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen: the Gudem-Rampa Risings, 1839–1924', in Ranajit Guha, ed. *Subaltern Studies*, Vol.1, New Delhi, 1982.

4. Delhi, 1995.

of this genre. There also have been a range of studies on these areas from the perspective of environmental history, specifically looking at peasant resistance to commercial forestry, like Ramchandra Guha's *The Unquiet Woods* and Mahesh Rangarajan's *Fencing the Forest*.⁵

While these have been substantial contributions to enlarging the area of historical interest, they suffer from two major weaknesses.

They implicitly lump all these border zones into one undifferentiated category of the 'other' of settled agricultural, caste-Hindu elite controlled India. They retrieve the history of these areas primarily as the struggle of marginal, oppressed people against the domination and exploitation of these very same civilisational centres and their elites. Thus they, unwittingly, re-integrate these areas and their people into the discursive boundaries of India by writing their histories only as narratives of contestation with the social formation of the civilisational centres or with colonialism.

Let us examine the point about the lumping of all regions outside the civilisational centres into one, seemingly undifferentiated, category.

Within the territorial boundaries of what eventually came to be referred to as India, there were two main types of border zones – the 'inaccessible' areas between the major river valleys/civilisational centres and the areas which formed the geographical boundaries of the sub-continent in the West, North and East. The hilly and forested zones lying between the flood plains would be examples of the first while the Thar Desert and the Himalayas would be examples of the second. It is interesting that most of the recent scholarship on marginal regions and people has been confined to the first type. This book has tried to study one area falling in the second type of border zones – the Western Himalayas.

It is these second type of border zones which refuse easy classification.⁶ This is primarily because of their Janus like character, which is central to their existence as borders. They have grown over centuries as the physical divide between Indian and outside social

5. Mahesh Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces 1860–1914*, Delhi, 1994.

6. The work which has influenced me most in the understanding of borders as a distinct space in historical contexts is Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, New York, 1940.

formations, and have mediated the contact between them. They rarely, if ever and then only in small pockets, contain sedentary agricultural communities. Rather, mobile populations of pastoralists and traders generally mark them. Some significant geographical feature – mountains, deserts or large grassland of low rainfall – mark these types of borders.

Forests too have formed such boundaries but they have been prone to erasure by the iron axes of a growing population and expanding trade and economy within the civilisational centres. But, historically, forests coupled with mountainous terrain have been the most difficult of borders. Immigrations have been possible through the clear desert-like mountains of Afghanistan. Similarly, trade along the Silk Route survived centuries of unrest and warfare in the steppes of Central Asia.

But movement of men and materials on a similar scale is missing in the history of the mountains which stretch from Kashmir to Burma due to the combination of difficult topography and extreme climates with dense forests. This border was too difficult to cross – too high, too steep, too forested in the Himalayas, too dry in Tibet, too cold, too sparsely populated and too expansive. The Himalayas remained relatively untouched by contact with their neighbouring riparian civilisations.

Anthropologists, and sociologists, given the nature of their disciplinary structure, have been less inclined to view the history of the Western Himalayas as a sub-set of the larger history of India. On the other hand, anthropological and sociological literature on the Western Himalayas has invariably used concepts derived from the societies of the plains to understand and explain the social world of the Western Himalayas. The two most obvious conceptual smugglings have been the idea of caste and polyandry.

Use of the concept ‘caste’ has been the thin edge of the wedge that has opened the door to scholars for the wholesale deployment of alien sociological concepts to understand the social formation of the region. It is very common to find the word ‘caste’ used, by nineteenth century British writers to refer to any social division in the Western Himalayas, without much conceptual clarity. They use this word interchangeably with others like tribe, people, class, race, clan, group, community, etcetera in their writings. It has therefore become easier to read caste into these sources for present day researchers.

A look at the manner in which the term and concept of caste has been used by Gerald D. Berreman in his book would illustrate this point in general. He quotes another anthropologist, D.N. Majumdar, the pioneer in studying polyandry in the Western Himalayas, to explain the region's social structure.

All over the cis-Himalayan region, the Simla States, the Doon valley, Kullu and Kangra valleys there exists a hierarchy of social status, though the rigidity of the caste system as in the plains does not exist. The upper class consists of Brahmins and Rajputs (Kshatriyas)...the lower strata is composed of innumerable social groups who form the artisan elements in the population of these parts.... These suffer from a number of disabilities and are treated as serfs or dependants...⁷

This statement is a fairly accurate, even if simplified, description of the social divisions of the Western Himalayas. Berreman accepts that unlike the 'three fold (twice-born, Shudra, untouchable) if not fivefold (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, untouchable) caste division' found in the plains, one can only notice a two fold division in this region which runs along the lines of the Khashas and the Doms (artisans). He further remarks on the absence of any significant social distance between the various sub-castes, which are also not necessarily endogamous. Ritual purity too does not play any significant role in the relations between the two castes, or their sub-castes, except in the case of a handful of orthodox Brahmin families and some groups of carcass removers and leather workers.⁸ It is also evident from his study that the form of the family and the nature of marriage ceremonies do not differ much between the Himalayan Brahmins and the village menials.

Yet neither Berreman nor Majumdar, like most other writers on the region, ever subject the concept of caste to any critique and continue applying it as the central concept for understanding the region's social structure.⁹ There seem to be two broad reasons for this adherence to

7. D. N. Majumdar, *The Fortunes of Primitive Tribes*, Lucknow, 1944, pg.137, quoted in Gerald D. Berreman, *Hindus of the Himalayas*, Delhi, 1997, pg.200.

8. *Ibid.*

9. "There can be no doubt that we are dealing with a caste society", Gerald D. Berreman, *ibid.* Even Ramchandra Guha, op.cit. uses caste as the central sociological category of the region.

the category of caste to describe and understand Western Himalayan social organisation.

The first reason seems to be that the structure of their methodology tends to privilege the present over the past, and as has been indicated in chapters 5 and 6, caste was becoming the dominant form in which social identities were increasingly expressed by the Himalayan peasant. But the social structure which underpinned this identity claim still retained its basic non-caste form. It is surprising that the absence of the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) – the ubiquitous agricultural castes of North India – did not alert these researchers to the possibility of looking at this region without using the prism of caste.

This inability to come out of the prison of caste, it seems, is because the Western Himalayas have been seen as a sub-set of the larger story of India and not as a borderland, both historically and sociologically.

The structure of this book has deliberately been kept close to a traditional historical narrative which spends more time describing the facts and historical processes, rather than one which engages in historiographical contestations. The attempt in the first two chapters of this book has been to try and detail the deep points of divergence, both physical and social, between the Western Himalayas and the plains of North India. This was crucial to ground the argument, again implicitly, which has been fleshed out in the next four chapters – that the establishment of British rule in the Western Himalayas and its consequent political and economic merger with the colonial empire led to a rupture in the existing historical processes of the region and initiated far reaching transformations in the social structure *without being cataclysmic*.

While it is true that the changes consequent to the establishment of British rule were deep rooted in all parts of their Indian Empire and led to massive social, economic and political dislocation and restructuring, it may be possible to argue that the proportion, speed and nature of change that one can identify here in the Western Himalayas is qualitatively different. This is partly because the changes, while they were deep rooted and basic in their nature, never turned the lived world of the Himalayan peasant upside down.

It is important to remember that much of the transformations were not cataclysmic. There was no large scale uprooting of established political entities or disruption of political processes. No radical change

in either productive or tertiary economic activities was imposed nor was there a sudden dislocation of economic agents. There was no attempt to impose social or cultural codes. In fact, as chapter 3 shows, even the British settlements were far removed from the local habitations and thus there was minimal physical contact.

One of the possible causes for the colonial State and its economic and social processes remaining non-cataclysmic may be found in the social formation of the region at the arrival of the British. This social formation was unstable, characterised by a struggle between clan and State. This struggle between clan and State, in turn, was based on the inability of settled agriculture to expand sufficiently to produce the sort of surplus which would enable long term accumulation of wealth. Based incompletely on under-developed agriculture, it was crucially dependent on pastoralism, foraging and gathering activities. More importantly, the Himalayan State had not yet managed to organise these disparate productive activities under the stable domination of settled agriculture and its relation of production.

The physical features of the region scattered the populations and economic resources, became an insurmountable barrier both for economic and political consolidation and thus slowed down the normal rhythms of historical processes. Those processes of transformation to agriculture from either foraging and gathering, or from pastoralism, which played themselves out, and were in a sense completed, in the more malleable physical zones of the Indo-Gangetic plains, became stunted in the Western Himalayas and, in a sense, froze in time. The transition from *Lineage to State*, that has so illuminatingly been described by Romila Thapar for the North Indian plains,¹⁰ could not complete itself in the Western Himalayas, even though there is evidence that this process had already begun in the first millennium of the Christian era.¹¹

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10. Romila Thapar, *From Lineage to State: Social Formations in the Mid-First Millennium B.C. in the Ganga Valley*, Delhi, 1990. Also see Ram Sharan Sharma, *The State and Varna Formation in the Mid-Ganga Plains: An Ethnoarchaeological View*, Delhi, 1996.
 11. J. Hutchison, and J. Ph. Vogel, *History of Punjab Hill States*, 2 Vols, Lahore, 1933, see chapters one and two.

The daily life of the people was largely conditioned by the parameters of this struggle between clan and State – a struggle which embodied in itself the incomplete process of historical transformation – and which forced the Himalayan peasants to actively negotiate between the demands of two radically different social formations. It may be possible to argue that when the colonial State entered and took control of this historical stage, it was possible for the Himalayan peasant to continue negotiating these changes, as he had been doing between the clan and the State.

It seems possible, on the basis of the discussions in chapter 3 to assert with some confidence that the region lost its centrality to the British colonial project in India even before their rule had properly stabilised here. The little of the sharp philanthropy of pre-1857 British rule that may, in normal course, have been felt by the inhabitants, was thwarted due to the sheer difficulty of the physical terrain. There is enough evidence to suggest that many self-righteous colonial officers were itching to ‘reform’ local society, but all such efforts had to wait the building of the Hindustan-Tibet road in the 1850s and the establishment of more durable British settlements.

But I would argue that the non-cataclysmic nature of the colonial encounter in the Western Himalayas was also because of another feature of the region’s geographical make-up. Practically all the British settlements came up on the wooded mountain ridges, at an average altitude of 7000 feet, while the traditional habitations of the local people were in the valleys. There may have been some heartburn and conflict over the control of the woods and pastures on these mountain tops and ridges, but these could not have been widespread since the total number of British settlements were few.

While the British would conscript larger and larger numbers of Himalayan peasants for carrying their baggage and serving their needs in the emergent hill stations, they rarely, if ever, encroached on the village sites or farmlands, local pastures or forests of the villagers, nor did they interfere with the established patterns of life in any significant manner. The villagers would trek from their homes in the valleys and give service at the British residences on the mountain tops and ridges and return to their homes. Almost all the Indian population of the Hill Station was composed of people from the plains, some from as far away as Bengal and Madras presidencies. Therefore, not only

was there a physical distance between the habitations of the Himalayan peasant there was a cultural separation too.

This physical distance between the new rulers and the local population can be illustrated by looking at the forests.

It is now almost universally accepted that the introduction of commercial forestry by the colonial State led to massive economic dislocation of the local populations in the Western Himalayas. I would suggest that this argument is overstated.

Forests attracted the attention of the British even before they had conquered these territories from the Gurkhas. The 1808 Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal expedition to discover the sources of the Ganges, which has been mentioned in the third chapter, reported in great details about the extent, nature and commercial possibilities of the wood available in the Western Himalayas. It appears that British and other European traders were already logging at a furious pace in the mid 1830s, in the valleys of the Sutlej and Yamuna at least, if the descriptions in H. Cleghorn's report of 1861 are correct. This logging was extremely damaging for the forests according to this very source and only two out of ten trees cut reached the logging depots in any useable shape. The environmental damage can only be imagined.

But the point is not environmental damage. The only way these giant trees could be transported to the plains was by floating them down the big rivers, like the Sutlej, Yamuna, Tons, Beas, etcetera which carry large volumes of water and where the rocks would not become a barricade for the logs to float downstream. The advantage these loggers had in the valleys of these big rivers was that the mountain sides on both sides of these rivers were thick with forests and usually had steep gradients.

It was because of these physical features that not many human habitations came up on these river valleys. Most habitations needed agricultural land and pastures for domestic animals close at hand. They needed irrigation water for at least some fields. The technology available with the Himalayan peasant made it difficult to clear these thick forests, cut terraces for cultivation in these steep gradients and also divert the water of these deep rivers for irrigation. While there were a few habitations in the valleys of these rivers most of these were situated in the smaller tributaries and rivulets. The only exception to this rule seems to be the capital seats of the larger Hill States –

Rampur, the capital of Bushahr was situated on the Sutlej and Mandi State's capital was situated on the banks of the Beas. But then these two towns were precisely those which were not directly dependent on primary production for their survival.

It was only when the roads network penetrated the interiors of the Himalayas that commercial forestry actually impacted on the social structures of the people. And this took more than a century after the British conquest to happen, that is, well into the third decade of the twentieth century.

Apart from arguing that the effects of British rule in the Western Himalayas were not sudden and socially cataclysmic on the social formation this book argues that the other important function of British rule was to provide the enabling tools for the social and political integration of the region with the emergent Indian Nation. The introduction of money and markets for local products right inside the Western Himalayas, the establishment of hill stations, the land and forest settlements, the establishment of schools and courts, the stabilisation of political relations between the hill state and the clan through the Sanads, and the opening up of communications, first with roads and then with newspapers, telegraphs, phones and railways were among these enabling tools.

The various chapters have already discussed the various ways in which money impacted on the local economy and society, the implications of political stabilisation under the hill states and the impact of education and new professions on the people. The point that needs some reiteration is that whatever the other specific effects of political stability under the system of hill states inaugurated by the British, it ended the continuous struggle between these hill states and the political clans and their devtas over control of the resources. It did inaugurate a period of unambiguous rule by the State.

This State was a continuation in both name and form of the previous entity, even though its internal structure was changed, more so in the case of the smaller hill states like the Athara Thakurai of the Simla hills. Even in areas where the hill state lapsed into the direct rule of the British Government, no interference resulted in the daily workings and internal authority of the clans. This made the new political system so much more easier to accept for the Himalayan

peasant. But even more than acceptability it inaugurated a long period, perhaps the longest period ever in the history of the region, of political stability. This cessation of constant attrition and struggle between the political institutions for pre-eminence created the conditions which could allow the emergence of a somewhat long term process for the creation of a stable political identity for the people.

Similarity of political conditions combined with stability over decades, created the conditions and possibilities where a political identity could arise, which shared similar traits of social organisation and historical experience. The clans and their origin myths already gave the vast majority of the people a basis for uniting under a political identity. It may be possible to state that the stability provided by British rule created conditions for the stabilisation of social and political conditions in the Western Himalayas. And this stabilisation was the ground on which emerged and developed the new identities of caste and Nation.

But for the emergence of these identities, another factor needs to be kept in mind, which was very specific to the Western Himalayas – the hill stations. These hill stations were not only ‘Little Englands’ for the ruling British elite, but had a large population of non-Europeans – officials, traders, educationists, political personalities and others from the different corners of the British Indian Empire. It was this presence of the Hindu caste which helped integrate the religious practices and social identities of the Himalayan people into the larger Hindu fold. And it were these hill stations that were the nuclei for the markets which pumped money into the local economy and helped bring together the two distinct processes of growing economic integration and social conformity.

To the Himalayan peasant, British rule came wearing the fabled seven veils. By the time he had unravelled the many veils of State, market, money, education, communication, family and political power that colonialism presented him, he was presented with the alluring face of the young Indian Nation. By all accounts, it has been a happy marriage.

Glossary

Sr. No.	Term	Meaning
1.	Aal	Clan or lineage.
2.	Angrez	English, also refers to Europeans in a general way.
3.	Anna	One sixteenth of a Rupee.
4.	Asura	Literally, demon refers to the marriage type which does not follow the rules set down by orthodox Hinduism. Most glaring features of such marriages are bride price and easy dissolubility leading to lack of female chastity and no fixed paternity.
5.	Athara Thakurai	Name given to the principalities which lay in the basin of the Sutlej and along its watershed with the Beas and the Tonse. Some were merely territories of clans while others were somewhat bigger and more developed as States. Later these formed the Simla hill states within the Punjab hill states.
6.	Athwara Begar	Begar given as part of the regular revenue dues. Before the coming of the

		British it usually averaged one male's labour for six months of the year, per family.
7.	Basa/Bassa	Land which was owned by the King and the immediate Royal family. Almost always cultivated by Bethus.
8.	Begar	Compulsory labour provided by subjects to rulers , both secular and divine, and their agents.
9.	Beth	Agricultural labour, provided by unfree peasants who were bonded to their master's land either due to ritual reasons or for debt re-payment. Similar to <i>serf</i> in medieval Europe.
10.	Bethu	Person who gave <i>Beth</i> labour. Had no claim on the land they tilled, either for their master or for their own subsistence. Often used in sources as synonym for <i>Koli</i> , the largest of the agricultural labourer communities who were mostly Bethus.
11.	Bhaichara	(literally) Brotherhood. All male members (and their families) of a lineage who claimed a single originator/ancestor.
12.	Bhar	Measure of weight
13.	Bowara	Reciprocal labour given and received by members of a <i>Bhaichara</i>
14.	Chauki	Police post.
15.	Chhak	Meal provided to Bethus while they work on the peasant's land.
16.	Dharamsala	Inn, resthouse.
17.	Dom	One of the servile communities, agricultural labour and other menial occupations. Supposed to belong to <i>Naga</i> tribes.
18.	Dumh	Rebellion, Insurrection, non-cooperation by peasants with rulers

		and their agents, refusal to accept orders from superiors.
19.	Goor	Oracle of the deity.
20.	Gurkha	In the sources quoted here, refers to person from Nepal.
21.	Hartal	Strike.
22.	Hela Begar	Begar which had to be given under special circumstances, like birth, marriage or death in the royal family. Often it combined labour with contributions in kind like grass, fuelwood, food and even coins.
23.	Hukka pani	Literally, tobacco and water. Refers to the services and resources of the community which are drawn upon by a person to be able to live as a member of that community. Stopping <i>hukka pani</i> would imply a social boycott of the person by the entire community.
24.	Jaggi	
25.	Jagir	Land endowed with certain judicial and revenue rights on the holder. In the Western Himalayas, almost always given to members of the royal family or very high State officials.
26.	Jagirdar	One holding a Jagir tenure.
27.	Joon	Measure of seed-weight, which was used to calculate the revenue under pre-British systems. Each Joon of seed was supposed to grow a certain amount of crop.
28.	Kanet	Revenue term used to denote the land owning peasantry in the pre-British times. The term continued in British records and became a site of contention.
29.	Kanyadan	Literally, giving away of daughter. Refers to a marriage type where the

		father gives the daughter to the groom and is associated with following orthodox Hindu rules and associated practices of female chastity, absence of remarriage and dowry.
30.	Khalsa	The political community / State of the Sikh ruler Ranjit Singh and his descendants.
31.	Khash	The name of an ancient tribe, whose descendants formed the majority of the peasant populations of the region; predominantly <i>Kanet</i> .
32.	Khel	Clan or lineage.
33.	Khumri	The general assembly of all the heads of families of a clan/village.
34.	Khund	Clan or lineage.
35.	Koli	One of the servile communities, agricultural labour and other menial occupations. Supposed to belong to <i>Naga</i> tribes.
36.	Lambardar	State official. Often the person directly administering a given area of the State.
37.	Lavi	The most important trade fair on the banks of the Sutlej at Rampur, the seat of the ruler of Bashahr. Held in the second week of November each year, it attracted traders from all over the Himalayas, the trans-Himalayan regions and the plains. It continues to this day.
38.	Malik-e-Adna	Junior/inferior owner of the land. Refers to the claims on land by the peasants (the <i>Khash-Kanets</i>).
39.	Malik-e-Ala	Senior/superior owner of land. Refers to the ruler of the hill state who was defined by the British as the final owner of all the land and natural resources of his State.

40.	Maufi	Revenue free land given to individuals or deities. Often hereditary, when given to individuals, but not necessarily including the claims on Begar from the peasants.
41.	Maufidar	Person owning <i>Muafi</i> land.
42.	Mawana	Same as Seana.
43.	Nagri	Script in use over most of North India.
44.	Paisacha	Animal. Refers to the marriage type where there is no permanent pairing and no rules of orthodox Hindu marriage are followed. Can be described as 'group marriage'.
45.	Pakka Seer	Weight measure, a little less than one kilogram.
46.	Phati	Village measure, a little less than one kilogram.
47.	Poorzee	Literally, paper. Often used as reference to record of revenue records given to the peasant indicating all his dues and his rights to the land.
48.	Pujari	Priest, usually denotes a person from the Khash Kanet (or even Dagi-Koli) background, who is often only a part time performer of religious rituals.
49.	Purohit	Priest, this term usually denotes an orthodox Hindu Brahmin priest.
50.	Raj	Rule.
51.	Rana	Royal title, generally considered higher in status to "Thakur" and lower to "Raja".
52.	Reet	Bride price.
53.	Ruhud	Same as Seana.
54.	Sanad	Treaty document between the British and the hill state, confirming their subsidiary status and recording the terms of the relations.

55.	Sasan	Revenue free land given from religious piety by the ruler. Most often the beneficiaries were Purohits and Pujaris and temples.
56.	Seana	The leader of the Khumri, its representative in relations with the State and other Khumris.
57.	Shikar	Hunt.
58.	Tankri	Script used in certain parts of the Western Himalayas. Is influenced by Tibetan script.
59.	Thakurai	Petty Hill State, ruled by a 'Thakur' the lowest of the rank in the hierarchy of hill rulers.
60.	Thok	Clan or lineage.
61.	Usufruct	Legal right to use and derive profit or benefit from property which does not belong to one. The Latin words <i>usus</i> and <i>fructus</i> refer to the rights of use and fruit.
62.	Vansavalis	Genealogies and histories of the ruling dynasties of the Western Himalayas.
63.	Wazeer	The chief administrator of the Hill State, the top political official of the ruler.

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Bundle	Sr. No.	Year	Subject
01	06	1909	Sent to Chief Minister Keonthal State Group – Ghund Jagirdars
01	07	1908	Settlement Report – Ghund State
01	09	1927	Ghund State Settlement
01	10	1913	Settlement – Ghund State Forests
02	41	1947	Keonthal Forest Settlement
02	46	1946	Ammendments to Tenancy Act
02	57	1946	Agricultural Experiments – Crop Cutting
02	64	nd.	Note on Measurements
02	66	1945	Method of Measurement to be adopted in Keonthal State
02	69	1943	Settlement Operations in Keonthal – Junga
03	76	1946	Agricultural Experiments – Crop Cutting
03	78	1945	Reserved Forests
03	79	1933	Settlement Operations in Keonthal State
10	342	1946	Revenue Settlement – Theog

11	343	1907	Management and Settlement of Theog State Forests
11	344	1910	Abolition of Custom RIT in Simla
11	346	1942	List of Act/Rules in Force in the Punjab Hill States
11	357	1946	Excise – Drugs – Supply – Opium
12	363	1941	Note on Settlement and rates of assessment, etc.
12	364	1946	Settlement in the Punjab Hill States
12	365	1941	Resettlement in Hatkoti Jagir
13	378	1946	Revenue Settlement – Rawingarh
13	379	1945	Balsan State Settlement Report
13	386	1936	Resettlement of Rawingarh State
13	387	1946	Agency – Rules – Instruction records – Weeding – Destruction
14	406	1893	Kumharsain Settlement
14	407	1895	Kumharsain Settlemet
16	450	1914	Rent of Poari and Bushahr Forests
17	451	1944	Begar in Simla Hill States
17	465	1940	Construction of Dams at Guma by Municipal Commissioner and objections thereto by Bhajji and Koti States
19	489	1939	Begar in the Simla Hill States
19	499	1936	Introduction of Panchayat System in Punjab Hill States
20	516	1945	Development programme of Kumharsain
20	518	1876	Bushahr Forest File
20	524	1947	Administration of Jubbal State
22	548	1932	Introduction of Panchayat Act, Simla Hill States
22	556	1944	List of Acts, Ordinances, Orders, etc. on the statutes of the Punjab Hill States
23	580	1899	Compensation to the zamindars of Koti for land to be acquired under the Simla water works extension scheme
23	581	1901	Compensation to the zamindars of Koti for land to be acquired under the Simla water works extension scheme

24	591	1899	Land acquisition for water works
25	592	1917	Acquisition of Chir catchment area
25	595	1917	Acquisition of Chir catchment area
25	598	1899	Compensation for land acquisition, Simla water works
25	603	1940	Request of watermill owners in the neighbourhood of Guma and Chaba for compensation on account of water scarcity
26	612	1946	Revenue Settlement – Keonthal
26	613	1912	Record of Rights of Keonthal State Forests
26	618	1941	Rules governing jagirs
26	619	1936	Lease of Puari Forests
26	627	1946	Pension – Political – Bushahr
27	638	1930	Poari Forest Lease II
30	776	1944	Correspondence Regarding Panchayat
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30	779	1941	Instructions – Taxation, Arbat, Dharat, etc.
30	787	1939	Instructions regarding legal points under Village Panchayat Act, 1939 – rules thereunder, amendments, etc.
30	790	1940	Clarifications, interpretations (Panchayat Act)
31	803	1943	Grant-in-Aid to Panchayats
31	808	1942	Report on the work of Assistant Panchayat Officer, Simla
32	811	1939	Classification of Panchayats
32	817	1947	Agricultural facilities and use of manure in Simla district
33	835	1947	Classification of soils to be adopted
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